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AN · INTRODUCTION · TO
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TENNYSON



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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POEMS OF TENNYSON

BY

HENRY VAN DYKE, D.D., LL.D.

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY



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PREFACE

THE essays here presented were prepared to accompany a volume of select poems of Tennyson in the Athenaeum Press Series. My object in writing them was to show the growth of the poet's mind and art, the methods which he followed, the variety of his work, and the chief qualities which mark his poetry. Studies of this kind may have an interest, and possibly some value, for students of English verse in general. For this reason — I may say with this hope — they are printed, with a few changes, in this little volume.

HENRY VAN DYKE.

AVALON, August 1, 1903.

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I

TENNYSON'S PLACE IN THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

“The voice of him the master and the sire
Of one whole age and legion of the lyre,
Who sang his morning-song when Coleridge still
Uttered dark oracles from Highgate Hill,
And with new launchèd argosies of rhyme
Gilds and makes brave this sombreing tide of time.

To him nor tender nor heroic muse
Did her divine confederacy refuse :
To all its moods the lyre of life he strung,
And notes of death fell deathless from his tongue,
Himself the Merlin of his magic strain,
He bade old glories break in bloom again ;
And so, exempted from oblivious gloom,
Through him these days shall fadeless break in bloom.”

WILLIAM WATSON, 1892.

I

TENNYSON'S PLACE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

TENNYSON seems to us, at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the most representative poet of the English race in the Nineteenth Century. Indeed it is doubtful whether any other writer during the last hundred years has reflected so clearly and so broadly, in verse or prose, the features of that composite age. The history of its aspirations and conflicts, its dreams and disappointments, its aesthetic revivals and scientific discoveries, its questioning spirit in religion and its dogmatic spirit in practical affairs, its curious learning and social enthusiasms and military reactions, its ethical earnestness, and its ever deepening and broadening human sympathy, may be read in the poetry of Tennyson.

Other poets may reflect some particular feature of the century more fully, but it is because they reflect it more exclusively. Thus Byron stands for the spirit of revolt against tyranny, Shelley for the dream of universal brotherhood, Keats for the passionate love of pure beauty, Matthew Arnold for the sadness of parting with ancient faiths, and Rudyard Kipling expresses the last phase of the century, the revival of militant imperialism, perhaps as well as it can be uttered in verse.

Wordsworth and Robert Browning are the only British poets of the Nineteenth Century, beside Tennyson, who have the breadth of view, the sane vigour and balance of mind, the penetration and the self-control, the well-rounded and mature

manhood, which entitle them to be regarded as general voices of their age. In each of them there is a certain power developed to an extraordinary intensity,—greater, I think, than we shall find in Tennyson. But at the same time, it seems to me true that each has certain defects from which Tennyson is comparatively free.

Wordsworth is perhaps the deepest and the steadiest thinker of the three. He has a very wide range of meditative sympathy, and his work has therefore a broad human significance. But his range of imaginative sympathy, the sphere within which he feels intensely and speaks vividly, is limited by his own individuality, deep, strong, unyielding, by his political opinions and prejudices, and by his secluded life among the mountains of Westmoreland. When he moves along his own line his work shines with a singular and unclouded lustre; at other times his genius fails to penetrate his material with the light of poesy. Much of his verse, serious and sincere, represents Wordsworth's reflections upon life, rather than the reflection of life in Wordsworth's poetry. In the art of verse, too, perfect as he is in certain forms, such as the sonnet, the simple lyric, the stately ode, his mastery is far from wide. In narrative he seldom moves with swiftness or certainty; in the use of dramatic motives to intensify a lyric, a ballad, an idyl, he has little skill.

Robert Browning, on the other hand, is probably the greatest dramatist of the three. In fact almost all his best work is essentially dramatic in spirit. That is to say, he apprehends life under the aspect of a conflict, a struggle between opposing wills, a strife of the individual against society, a warfare of man with circumstance. The crises in this struggle are the points where Browning finds his favourite subjects. His intellectual curiosity is immense. His interest in the concrete problems of human experience is vivid and inexhaustible.

He has the quickest and the keenest eye for the sharp details of life and knows how to make the little points in a face, in a scene, stand out unforgettable. His stage is crowded with all sorts and conditions of men and women. There is hardly any sphere of human activity or passion into which he has not entered. But almost everywhere, unless I am mistaken, it is not so much another character as it is Browning himself, transplanted to another age, another environment, who discloses to us his own feelings in his own speech. And that speech is peculiar, almost to the extent of deserving to be classed as a distinct dialect. There are times, indeed, when he writes the very best of English, clear, nervous, natural. But too often his style is corrugated and congested ; rough to the point of painfulness. This obscurity of manner, maintained with a touch of what seems almost like obstinacy, is not only a barrier which makes it difficult for the average man to understand Browning. It is also the sign of a certain attitude of independence, an isolation of mind, which hinders him, with all his breadth of interest in human life, from receiving and reflecting in poetry the general thought and feeling of his age. Thus, for example, the great conception of evolution, an orderly progress from lower to higher forms, a slow development of the race under the control of law, does not really pervade his poetry, though it was undoubtedly the dominant idea of the Nineteenth Century. Browning's stress is laid upon the individual, not upon the race. The moment of intense passion, of assertion, of action,—this is what he values most. Though so modern in many ways, in his central motive he is not in complete touch with the controlling spirit of his own times ; he is almost reactionary, mediæval.

But Tennyson, at least in the maturity of his powers, has not only a singularly receptive and responsive mind, open on all sides to impressions from nature, from books, and from

human life around him, and an imaginative sympathy, which makes itself at home and works dramatically in an extraordinary range of characters : he has also a wonderful mastery of the technics of the poetic art, which enables him to give back in a fitting form of beauty the subject which his genius has taken into itself. No other English poet since the Elizabethan age has used so many kinds of verse so well. None other has shown in his work a sensitiveness to the movements of his own time at once so delicate and so broad. To none other has it been given to write with undimmed eye and undiminished strength for so long a period of time, and thus to translate into poetry so many of the thoughts and feelings of the century in which he lived.

Whether a temperament so receptive, and an art so versatile, as Tennyson's, are characteristic of the highest order of genius, is an open question, which it is not necessary to decide nor even to discuss here. Certainly it would be absurd to maintain that his success in dealing with all subjects and in all forms of verse is equal. His dramas, for instance, do not stand in the first rank. His two epics, *The Princess* and *Idylls of the King*, have serious defects, the one in structure, the other in substance.

But, on the other hand, the broad scope of his poetic interest and the variety as well as the general felicity of his art, helped to make him the most popular poet of his time and race. Tennyson has something for everybody. He is easy to read. He has charm. Thus he has found a wide audience, and his poetry has not only reflected, but powerfully influenced, the movements of his age. The poet whose words are quoted is a constant, secret guide of sentiment and conduct. The man who says a thing first may be more original ; he who says it best is more potent. The characters which Tennyson embodied in his verse became memorable. The

ideals which he expressed in music grew more clear and beautiful and familiar to the hearts of men, leading them insensibly forward. The main current of thought and feeling in the Nineteenth Century, at least among the English-speaking peoples,—the slow, steady, onward current of admiration, desire, hope, aspiration, and endeavour,—followed the line traced in the poetry of Tennyson.

This very fact, it seems to me, makes it easy to undervalue Tennyson at the present time. His ideas have become part of the common stock. His ways of expressing them have been imitated until their freshness is gone. His phrases and turns of speech are current coin. The beauty of the image, the clearness of the inscription, no longer awaken wonder. Many people recognize originality only in the form of novelty. There is also a perverse school of criticism which holds that nothing which is popular can be really great in poetry. The fame of Tennyson, at all events, has suffered a slight obscuration in certain literary quarters, and the endurance of his work is questioned.

No doubt the day when everything that he wrote was sure of an immediate welcome by tens of thousands of eager readers, has passed. In the mass of his work, so copious and so varied,—lyrical poems, ballads, English idyls, elegies, war-songs, love-songs, dramas, poems of art, classical imitations, dramatic monologues, fairy-tales, patriotic poems, idyls of chivalry, dramas, odes, character studies, rhapsodies of faith,—there are degrees of excellence. Some of it will prove to have only what Emerson calls a “deciduous” charm. Some of it will look dull and bare when the transient interest derived from its close relation and reference to “questions of the hour” has dropped away. Some of it, perhaps, will even become obscure or unintelligible to the plain reader, as the fashion of our English speech slowly changes.

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But that a considerable body of his best work will endure, and will be not only praised by students of English verse, but also read by lovers of poetry for its own sake, it is hardly possible to doubt. For many generations to come these most characteristic poems of Tennyson, signed, as we may say, not merely with his name but with the mark of his individuality as an artist, will keep their hold upon those who turn to literature for a gift of inward pleasure and an increase of the joy of living. They will be appreciated for the lucid beauty of their expression, the nobility of their thought, the depth of their human sympathy. But they will be best understood by those who know something of the life and character of the man who wrote them, the sources from which he drew inspiration, the methods of work which he followed, and the qualities which distinguish his poetry at its best. To such readers it will appear that the life of the Nineteenth Century, on its poetic side at least, has found its most adequate and beautiful expression in the voice of Tennyson.

II

AN OUTLINE OF TENNYSON'S LIFE

“ Brother of the greatest poets, true to nature, true to art;
Lover of Immortal Love, uplifter of the human heart!
Who shall cheer us with high music, who shall sing if thou depart?”

IN LUCEM TRANSITUS, 1892.

II

AN OUTLINE OF TENNYSON'S LIFE

Parentage and Birth.—Alfred Tennyson was born on the 6th of August, 1809, at Somersby, a little village in Lincolnshire. He was the fourth child in a family of twelve, eight boys and four girls, all of whom but two lived to pass the limit of three score years and ten. The stock was a strong one, probably of Danish origin, but with a mingled strain of Norman blood through the old family of d'Eyncourt, both branches of which, according to Burke's Peerage, are represented by the Tennysons.

The poet's father, the Rev. Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, was rector of Somersby and Wood Enderby. His wife, Elizabeth Fytche, was the daughter of the vicar of Louth, a neighbouring town. Dr. Tennyson was the eldest son of a lawyer of considerable wealth, but was disinherited, by some caprice of his father, in favour of a younger brother. The rector of Somersby was a man of large frame, vigorous mind, and variable temper. He had considerable learning, of a broad kind, and his scholarship, if not profound, was practical, for he taught his sons the best of what they knew before they entered the university. A great lover of music and architecture, fond of writing verse, genial and brilliant in social intercourse, excitable, warm-hearted, stern in discipline, generous in sympathy, he was a personality of overflowing power ; but at times he was subject to fits of profound depression and gloom, in which the memory of his father's unkindness darkened his mind, and he seemed almost to lose himself in bitter and

despondent moods. Mrs. Tennyson was a gentle, loving, happy character, by no means lacking in strength, but excelling in tenderness, ardent in feeling, vivid in imagination, fervent in faith. It is said that "the wicked inhabitants of a neighbouring village used to bring their dogs to her windows and beat them, in order to be bribed to leave off by the gentle lady, or to make advantageous bargains by selling her the worthless curs." Her son Alfred drew her portrait lovingly in the poem called "*Isabel*" and in the closing lines of *The Princess* :—

Not learned, save in gracious household ways,
Not perfect, nay, but full of tender wants,
No Angel, but a dearer being, all dipt
In Angel instincts, breathing Paradise,
Interpreter between the gods and men,
Who look'd all native to her place, and yet
On tiptoe seem'd to touch upon a sphere
Too gross to tread, and all male minds perforce
Sway'd to her from their orbits as they moved,
And girdled her with music.

The poet's reverent and loyal love for his father is expressed in the lines "*To J. S.*" Both parents saw in their child the promise of genius, and hoped great things from him.

The Imitative Impulse. — The boy grew up, if not precisely in Milton's "quiet and still air of delightful studies," yet in an atmosphere that was full of stimulus for the imagination and favourable to the unfolding of lively powers of thought and feeling. It was an obscure hamlet of less than a hundred inhabitants where the Tennysons resided, but it was a full home in which they lived,— full of children, full of books, full of music, full of fanciful games and pastimes, full of human interests, full of life. The scenery about Somersby is friendly and consoling; gray hills softly sloping against the sky; wide-branching elms, trembling poplars, and drooping ash-trees; rich gardens, close-embowered, full of trailing roses,

crowned lilies, and purple-spiked lavender; long ridges of pasture land where the thick-fleeced sheep are herded; clear brooks purling over ribbed sand and golden gravel, with many a curve and turn; broad horizons, low-hung clouds, mellow sunlight; birds a plenty, flowers profuse. All these sweet forms Nature printed on the boy's mind. Every summer brought a strong contrast, when the family went to spend their holiday in a cottage close beside the sea, on the coast of Lincolnshire, among the tussocked ridges of the sand-dunes, looking out upon

The hollow ocean-ridges, roaring into cataracts.

The boy had an intense passion for the sea, and learned to know all its moods and aspects. "Somehow," he said, later in life, "water is the element I love best of all the four."

When he was seven years old he was sent to the house of his grandmother at Louth, to attend the grammar-school. But it was a hard school with a rough master, and the boy hated it. After three years he came home to continue his studies under his father.

His closest comrade in the home was his brother Charles, a year older than himself. (See *In Memoriam*, lxxix, and "Prefatory Poem to My Brother's Sonnets.") The two lads had many tastes in common, especially their love of poetry. They read widely, and offered the sincerest tribute of admiration to their favourite bards. Alfred's first attempt at writing verse was made when he was eight years old. He covered two sides of a slate with lines in praise of flowers, in imitation of Thomson, the only poet whom he then knew. A little later Pope's *Iliad* fascinated him, and he produced many hundreds of lines in the same style and metre. At twelve he took Scott for his model, and turned out an epic of six thousand lines. Then Byron became his idol. He wrote lyrics full of

gloom and grief, a romantic drama in blank verse, and imitations of the *Hebrew Melodies*.

Some of the fruitage of these young labours may be seen in the volume entitled *Poems by Two Brothers*, which was published anonymously by Charles and Alfred Tennyson, at Louth, in 1827, and republished in 1893, with an effort to assign the pieces to their respective authors, by the poet's son, the present Lord Tennyson. The motto on the title-page of the plump, modest little volume is from Martial: *Hæc nos novimus esse nihil*. It is because of this knowledge that the book has value as a document in the history of Tennyson's development. It shows a receptive mind, a quick, immature fancy, and considerable fluency and variety in the use of metre. It marks a distinct stage of his growth,—the period when his strongest poetic impulse was imitative.

The æsthetic Impulse. — In 1828 Tennyson, with his brother Charles, entered Trinity College, Cambridge. Almost from the beginning he was a marked man in the undergraduate world. His personal appearance was striking. Tall, large-limbed, deep-chested; with a noble head and abundance of dark, wavy hair; large, brown eyes, dreamy, yet bright; swarthy complexion ("almost like a gypsy," said Mrs. Carlyle); and a profile like a face on a Roman coin; he gave the immediate impression of rare gifts and power in reserve. "I remember him well," wrote Edward Fitzgerald, "a sort of Hyperion." His natural shyness and habits of solitude kept him from making many acquaintances, but his friends were among the best and most brilliant men in the University: Richard Monckton Milnes, Richard Chenevix Trench, W. H. Brookfield, John Mitchell Kemble, James Spedding, Henry Alford, Charles Buller, Charles Merivale, W. H. Thompson, and most intimate of all, Arthur Henry Hallam. This was an extraordinary circle of youths; distinguished for scholarship, wit, eloquence, freedom of

thought ; promising great things, which most of them achieved. Among these men Tennyson's strength of mind and character was recognized, but most of all they were proud of him as a coming poet. In their college rooms, with an applauding audience around him, he would chant in his deep, sonorous voice such early poems as "The Hesperides," "Oriana," "The Lover's Tale."

He did not neglect his studies, the classics, history, and the natural sciences ; but his general reading meant more to him. He was a member of an inner circle called the "Apostles," a society devoted to 'religion and radicalism.' (See *In Memoriam*, lxxxvii.) The new spirit, represented in literature by Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, took possession of him. He went back to the Elizabethan age, to Milton's early poems, as the fountain-heads of English lyrical poetry. Not now as an imitator, but as a kindred artist, he gave himself to the search for beauty, freedom, delicate truth to nature, romantic charm.

His poem of "Timbuctoo," which won the Chancellor's gold medal in 1829, was only a working-over of an earlier poem on "The Battle of Armageddon," and he thought little of it. But in 1830 he published a slender volume entitled *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, which shows the quality of his work in this period when the aesthetic impulse was dominant in him. They are marked by freshness of fancy, melody of metre, vivid descriptive touches, and above all by what Arthur Hallam, in his thoughtful review of the volume, called "a strange earnestness in his worship of beauty."

In the summer of 1830, Hallam and Tennyson made a journey together to the Pyrenees, to carry some funds which had been raised in England to the Spanish insurgents who were fighting for liberty. Tennyson was not in sympathy with the conservatism which then, as in Wordsworth's day, made

Cambridge seem narrow and dry and heartless to men of free and ardent spirit. In 1831 the illness and death of his father made it necessary for him to leave college and go home to live with the family at Somersby, where he remained for six years. In 1832 he published his second volume of *Poems*, dated 1833.

The tone and quality of this volume are the same that we find in its predecessor, but the manner is firmer, stronger, more assured. There is also a warmer human interest in such poems as "The Miller's Daughter" and "The May Queen"; and in "The Palace of Art" there is a distinct intimation that the purely æsthetic period of his poetic development is nearly at an end.

The criticism which these two volumes received, outside of the small circle of Tennyson's friends and admirers, was severe and scornful. *Blackwood's Magazine* called the poet the pet of a Cockney coterie, and said that some of his lyrics were "dismal drivel." *The Quarterly Review* sneered at him as "another and a brighter star of that galaxy or *milky way* of poetry, of which the lamented Keats was the harbinger." Tennyson felt this contemptuous treatment deeply. It seemed to him that the English people would never like his work. His æsthetic period closed in gloom and discouragement.

The Religious and Personal Impulse. — But far heavier than any literary disappointment was the blow that fell in 1833 when his dearest friend, Arthur Hallam, to whom his sister Emilia was promised in marriage, died suddenly in Vienna. This great loss, coming to Tennyson at a time when the first joy of youth was already overcast by clouds of loneliness and despondency, was the wind of destiny that drove him from the pleasant harbour of dreams out upon the wide, strange, uncharted sea of spiritual strife and sorrow, — the sea which seems so bitter and so wild, but on whose farther shore those who bravely make

the voyage find freedom and security and peace and the generous joy of a larger, nobler life. The problems of doubt and faith which had been worked out with abstract arguments and fine theories in the Apostles' Society at Cambridge, now became personal problems for Tennyson. He must face them and find some answer, if his life was to have a deep and enduring harmony in it,—a harmony in which the discords of fear and self-will and despair would dissolve. The true answer, he felt sure, could never be found in selfish isolation. The very intensity of his grief purified it as by fire, made it more humane, more sympathetic. His conflict with "the spectres of the mind" was not for himself alone, but for others who must wrestle as he did, with sorrow and doubt and death. The deep significance, the poignant verity, the visionary mystery of human existence in all its varied forms, pressed upon him. Like the Lady of Shalott in his own ballad, he turned from the lucid mirror of fantasy, the magic web of art, to the real world of living joy and grief. But it was not a curse, like that which followed her departure from her cloistered tower, that came upon the poet, drawn and driven from the tranquil, shadowy region of exquisite melodies and beautiful pictures. It was a blessing,—the blessing of clearer, stronger thought, deeper, broader feeling, more power to understand the world and more energy to move it.

Tennyson's personal sorrow for the loss of Hallam is expressed in the two lyrics "Break, break, break" and "In the Valley of Cauteretz," poems which should always be read together as the cry of grief and the answer of consolation. His long spiritual struggle with the questions of despair and hope, of duty and destiny, which were brought home to him by the loss of his friend, is recorded in *In Memoriam*. The poem was begun at Somersby in 1833 and continued at different places and times, as the interwoven lyrics show, for

nearly sixteen years. Though the greater part of it was written by 1842, it was not published until 1850. Mr. Gladstone thought it "the richest oblation ever offered by the affection of friendship at the tomb of the departed." It is that and something more: it is the great English classic on the love of immortality and the immortality of love. Tennyson said, "It was meant to be a kind of *Divina Commedia*, ending with happiness." The central thought of the poem is

'T is better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.

Wherein it is better now, and why the poet trusts it will be better still in the long future,—this is the vital question which the poem answers in music.

But apart from these lyrics of personal grief, and this rich, monumental elegy, there are other poems of Tennyson, written between 1833 and 1842, which show the extraordinary deepening and strengthening of his mind during this period of inward crisis. For ten years he published no book. Living with his mother and sisters at Somersby, at High Beech in Epping Forest, at Tunbridge Wells, at Boxley near Maidstone; caring for the family, as the eldest son at home, and skilfully managing the narrow means on which they had to live; wandering through the country on long walking tours; visiting his friends in London now and then; falling in love finally and forever with Miss Emily Sellwood, to whom he became engaged in 1836, but whom he could not marry yet for want of money; he held fast to his vocation, and though he sometimes doubted whether the world would give him a hearing, he never wavered in his conviction that his mission in life was to be a poet. The years of silence were not years of vacancy. Here is a memorandum of a week's work: "*Monday*, History, German. *Tuesday*, Chemistry, German. *Wednesday*, Botany,

German. *Thursday*, Electricity, German. *Friday*, Animal Physiology, German. *Saturday*, Mechanics. *Sunday*, Theology. *Next week*, Italian in the afternoon. *Third week*, Greek. *Evenings*, Poetry." Hundreds of lines were composed and never written; hundreds more were written and burned. So far from being "an artist long before he was a poet," as Mr. R. H. Hutton somewhat vacuously says in his essay on Tennyson, he toiled terribly to make himself an artist, because he knew he was a poet. The results of this toil, in the revision of those of his early poems which he thought worthy to survive, and in the new poems which he was ready to publish, were given to the world in the two volumes of 1842.

The changes in the early poems were all in the direction of clearness, simplicity, a stronger human interest. The new poems included "The Vision of Sin," "The Two Voices," "Ulysses," "Morte d'Arthur," the conclusion of "The May Queen," "Lady Clara Vere de Vere," "Dora," "The Gardener's Daughter," "Locksley Hall," "St. Agnes' Eve," "Sir Galahad." With the appearance of these two volumes, Tennyson began to be a popular poet. But he did not lose his hold upon the elect, the 'fit audience, though few.' *The Quarterly Review*, *The Westminster Review*, Dickens, Landor, Rogers, Carlyle, Edward Fitzgerald, Aubrey de Vere, and such men in England, Hawthorne, Emerson, Lowell, and Poe in America, recognized the charm and the power of his verse. In 1845 Wordsworth wrote to Henry Reed of Philadelphia, "Tennyson is decidedly the first of our living poets, and I hope will live to give the world still better things."

Such was the liberating and ennobling effect of the deeper personal and spiritual impulse which came into his poetry with the experience of sorrow and inward conflict.

The Social Impulse. — From 1842 onward we find the poet, now better known to the world, coming into wider and closer

contact with the general life of men. Not that he ever lost the unconventional freedom of his dress and manner, the independence of his thought and taste, the singular frankness, almost *brusquerie* of his talk, which was like thinking aloud. He never became what is called, oddly enough, a "society man." He was incapable of roaring gently at afternoon teas or literary menageries. He was unwilling to join himself to any party in politics, as Dryden and Swift and Addison, or even as Southey and Wordsworth, had done. But he had a sincere love for genuine human intercourse, in which real thoughts and feelings are uttered by real people who have something to say to one another ; a vivid sense of the humorous aspects of life (shown in such poems as the two versions of the "Northern Farmer," "The Spinster's Sweet-Arts," "The Church-Warden") ; and a broad interest in the vital questions and the popular movements of his time. If I am not mistaken, this period when his poetry began to make a wider appeal to the people is marked by the presence of a new impulse in his work. We may call it, for the sake of a name, the social impulse, meaning thereby that the poet now looks more often at his work in its relation to the general current of human affairs and turns to themes which have a place in public attention.

There was also at this time an attempt on Tennyson's part to engage in business, which turned out to be a disastrous mistake. He was induced to go into an enterprise for the carving of wood by machinery. Into this he put all of his capital ; and some of the small patrimony of his brothers and sisters was embarked in the same doubtful craft. In 1843 the ship went down with all its lading, and the Tennysons found themselves on the coast of actual poverty. To add to this misfortune, the poet's health gave way completely, and he was forced to spend a long time in a water-cure establishment, under treatment for hypochondria.

In 1846 the grant of a pension of £200 from the Civil List, on the recommendation of Sir Robert Peel, cordially approved by the Queen, relieved the pressure of pecuniary need under which Tennyson had been left by the failure of his venture in wood. In 1847 he published, perhaps in answer to the demand for a longer and more sustained poem, *The Princess; A Medley*. It is an epic, complete enough in structure, but in substance half serious and half burlesque. It tells the story of a king's daughter who was fired with the ambition to emancipate (and even to separate) her sex from man, by founding a woman's college extraordinary. This design is crossed by the efforts of an amorous, chivalrous, faintly ridiculous prince, who courts her under difficulties and wins her through the pity that overcomes her when she sees him wounded almost to death by her brother. The central theme of the poem is the question of the higher education of women, but the style moves so obliquely in its mock heroics that it is hard to tell whether the argument is for or against. The diction is marked by Tennyson's two most frequent faults, over-decoration, and indirectness of utterance. It is much admired by girls at boarding-school, but the woman's college of the present day does not regard its academic programme with favour. The poem rises at the close to a very sincere and splendid eloquence in praise of true womanhood. The intercalary songs, which were added in 1850, include two or three of Tennyson's best lyrics. They shine like jewels in a setting which is not all of pure gold.

In 1850 there were three important events in the poet's life : his marriage with Miss Emily Sellwood ; the publication of the long-laboured *In Memoriam* ; and his appointment as Poet-Laureate, to succeed Wordsworth, who had just died. The three events were closely connected. It was the £300 received in advance for *In Memoriam* that provided a financial basis for the marriage ; and it was the profound admiration of

the Prince Consort for this poem that determined the choice of Tennyson for the Laureateship.

The marriage was in every sense happy. The poet's wife was not only of a nature most tender and beautiful; she was also a wise counsellor, a steadfast comrade, as he wrote of her,—

With a faith as clear as the heights of the June-blue heaven,
And a fancy as summer-new
As the green of the bracken amid the glow of the heather.

Their first home was made at Twickenham, and here their oldest and only surviving son, Hallam, was born. In 1852 the "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" was published. It was received with some disappointment and unfavourable criticism as the first production of the Laureate upon an important public event. But later and wiser critics generally incline to the opinion of Robert Louis Stevenson, who thought that the ode had "never been surpassed in any tongue or time."¹

In 1853, increasing returns from his books (about £500 a year) made it possible for Tennyson to lease, and ultimately to buy, the house and small estate of Farringford, near the village of Freshwater on the Isle of Wight. It is a low, rambling, unpretentious, gray house, tree-embowered, ivy-mantled, in a

careless-ordered garden,
Close to the ridge of a noble down.

His other home, Aldworth, near the summit of Black Down in Sussex, was not built until 1868. A statelier mansion, though less picturesque, its attraction as a summer home lies in the beauty of its terraced rose-garden, the far-reaching view which it commands to the south, and the refreshing purity of the upland air that breathes around it.

¹ Letters of R. L. Stevenson, Vol. I, p. 220.

In 1854 the famous poem on "The Charge of the Light Brigade" was published in *The London Examiner*. It was included, with the Wellington Ode, in the volume entitled *Maud, and Other Poems*, which appeared in the following year. *Maud* grew out of the dramatic lyric beginning "O that 't were possible," in *The Tribute*, 1837. Sir John Simeon said to Tennyson that something more was needed to explain the story of the lyric. He then unfolded the central idea in a succession of lyrics in which the imaginary hero reveals himself and the tragedy of his life. The sub-title *A Monodrama* was added in 1875. When Tennyson read the poem to me in 1892, he said "It is dramatic,—the story of a man who has a touch of inherited insanity, morbid and selfish. The poem shows what love has done for him. The war is only an episode." This is undoubtedly true and just. Yet the vigour of the long invective against the corruptions of a selfish peace, with which the poem opens, and the enthusiasm of the patriotic welcome to the Crimean war, with which it closes, show something of the way in which the poet's mind was working. This volume together with *The Princess* may be taken as an illustration of the force of the social impulse which has now entered into Tennyson's poetry to coöperate with the aesthetic impulse and the religious impulse in the full labours of his maturity.

Maturity.—Tennyson was now forty-five years old. But there still lay before him nearly forty years in which he was to bring forth poetry in abundance, a rich, varied, unfailing harvest. It is true that before this wonderful period of maturity ended there were signs of age visible in some of his work,—a slackening of vigour, an uncertainty of touch, a tendency to overload his verse with teaching, a failure to remove the traces of labour from his art, a lack of courage and sureness in self-criticism. But it was long before these marks of decline were visible, and even then, more than any other English poet

at an equal age, he kept, and in the hours of happy inspiration he revealed, the quick emotion, the vivid sensibility, the splendid courage of a heart that does not grow gray with years.

In 1859 the first instalment of his most important epic, *Idylls of the King*, appeared. It was followed in 1869, in 1872, in 1885, by the other parts of the complete poem. In 1864 *Enoch Arden* was published. In 1875 *Queen Mary*, the first of the dramas, came out, followed by *Harold* in 1876, and *The Cup and The Falcon* and *Becket* in 1884. In 1880 *Ballads, and Other Poems* contained some of his best work, such as "Rizpah," "The Revenge," "In the Children's Hospital." In 1885 *Tiresias, and Other Poems*; in 1886 *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*; in 1889 *Demeter, and Other Poems*, including "Romney's Remorse," "Vastness," "The Progress of Spring," "Merlin and The Gleam," "The Oak," "The Throstle," and that supreme lyric which Tennyson wished to have printed last in every edition of his collected works,— "Crossing the Bar." In 1892 the long list closes with *The Death of Oenone, Akbar's Dream, and Other Poems*.

The life of the man who was producing, after middle age, this great body of poetry, was full, rich, and happy. The one sorrow that crossed it was the death of his younger son, Lionel, in India, in 1886. Secluded, as ever, from the busyness of the world, but in no sense separated from its deeper interests, Tennyson studied and wrought, delighting in intercourse with his friends and in

converse with all forms
Of the many-sided mind,
And those whom passion hath not blinded,
Subtle-thoughted, myriad-minded.

In 1883 he accepted from the Queen the honour of a peerage (a baronetcy had been offered before and refused), and was

gazetted in the following year as Baron of Aldworth and Farringford. For himself, he frankly said, the dignity was one that he did not desire ; but he felt that he could not let his reluctance stand in the way of a tribute from the Throne to Literature. When he entered the House of Lords he took his seat on the cross-benches, showing that he did not wish to bind himself to any party. His first vote was cast for the Extension of the Franchise.

At the close of August 1892, when I saw him at Aldworth, he was already beginning to feel the warning touches of pain which preceded his last illness. But he was still strong and mighty in spirit, a noble shape of manhood, massive, large-browed, his bronzed face like the countenance of an antique seer, his scattered locks scarcely touched with gray. He was working on the final proofs of his last volume and planning new poems. At table his talk was free, friendly, full of humour and common-sense. In the library he read from his poems the things which illustrated the subjects of which he had been speaking,—passages from *Idylls of the King*, some of the songs, the “Northern Farmer (New Style)” and, more fully, *Maud* and the Wellington Ode. His voice was deep, rolling, resonant. It sank to a note of tenderness, touched with prophetic solemnity, as he read the last lines of the ode :—

Speak no more of his renown,
Lay your earthly fancies down,
And in the vast cathedral leave him,
God accept him, Christ receive him.

On the 6th of October, 1892, between one and two o'clock in the morning, with the splendour of the full moon pouring in through the windows of the room where his family were watching by his bed, he passed into the world of light. His body was laid to rest on the 12th of October, in Westminster Abbey,

next to the grave of Robert Browning, and close beside the monument of Chaucer. The mighty multitude of mourners who assembled at the funeral,—scholars, statesmen, nobles, private soldiers, veterans of the Balaclava Light Brigade, poor boys of the “Gordon Home,” — told how widely and deeply Tennyson had moved the hearts of all sorts and conditions of men by his poetry, — which was, in effect, his life.

III

TENNYSON'S USE OF HIS SOURCES

*Ein Quidam sagt, "Ich bin von keiner Schule !
Kein Meister lebt mit dem ich buhle ;
Auch bin ich weit davon entfernt,
Das ich von Todten was gelernt."
Das heisst, wenn ich ihn recht verstand ;
"Ich bin ein Narr auf eigne Hand."*

GORTHE.

III

TENNYSON'S USE OF HIS SOURCES

EMERSON was of the same opinion as Goethe in regard to originality. Writing of Shakespeare he says, "The greatest genius is the most indebted man," and defends the poet's right to take his material wherever he can find it. Shakespeare certainly exercised large liberty in that respect and did not even trouble himself to look for a defence. Wordsworth wrote, "*Multa tulit fecitque* must be the motto of all those who are to last." Most of the men whom the world calls great in poetry have drawn freely from the sources which are open to all, not only in nature, but also in the literature of the past, and in the thoughts and feelings of men around them,—the inchoate literature of the present.

From all these sources Tennyson took what he could make his own, and used it to enrich his verse. The gold thus gathered was not all new-mined; some of it had passed through other hands; but it was all new-minted,—fused in his imagination and fashioned into forms bearing the mark of his own genius. My object in the present writing is to give some idea of the way in which he collected his material and the method by which he wrought it into poetry.

(1.) With nature Tennyson dealt at first hand. A sensitive, patient, joyful observer, he watched the clouds, the waters, the trees, the flowers, the birds, for new disclosures of their beauty, new suggestions of their symbolic relation to the life of man. In a letter written to Mr. Dawson of Montreal, commenting upon the statement that certain lines of natural

description in his work were suggested by something in Wordsworth or Shelley, he demurs, with perceptible warmth, and goes on to say : " There was a period in my life when, as an artist, Turner for instance, takes rough sketches of landskip, etc., in order to work them eventually into some great picture, so I was in the habit of chronicling, in four or five words or more, whatever might strike me as picturesque in nature. I never put these down, and many and many a line has gone away on the north wind, but some remain." Then he gives some illustrations, among them,

A full sea glazed with muffled moonlight,

which was suggested by a night at Torquay, when the sky was covered with thin vapour. The line was afterwards embodied in *The Princess*, i, 244.

But in saying that he never wrote these observations down, the poet misremembers his own custom ; for his note-books contain many luminous fragments of recorded vision, like the following : —

(*Babbicombe.*) Like serpent-coils upon the deep.

(*Bonchurch.*) A little salt pool fluttering round a stone upon the shore. ("Guinevere," l. 50.)

(*The river Shannon, on the rapids.*) Ledges of battling water.

(*Cornwall.*) Sea purple and green like a peacock's neck. (See "The Daisy.")

(*Voyage to Norway.*) One great wave, green-shining past with all its crests smoking high up beside the vessel.

This last passage is transformed, in "Lancelot and Elaine," into a splendid simile : —

They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds, and thus,
Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they made
In moving, all together down upon him
Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,
Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all

Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,
And him that helms it, so they overbore
Sir Lancelot and his charger.

Tennyson was always fond of travel, and from all his journeys he brought back jewels which we find embedded here and there in his verse. The echoes in "The Bugle Song" were heard on the Lakes of Killarney in 1842. The Silver Horns of the Alps and the "wreaths of dangling water-smoke," in the "small sweet idyl" from *The Princess*, were seen at Lauterbrunnen in 1846. In "OEnone," —

My tall dark pines that plumed the craggy ledge
High over the blue gorge, and all between
The snowy peak and snow-white cataract,

were sketched in the Pyrenees in 1830. In the first edition of the poem he brought in a beautiful species of cicala, with scarlet wings, which he saw on his Spanish journey; though he was conscientious enough to add a footnote explaining that "probably nothing of the kind exists in Mount Ida."

It is true that in later editions he let the cicala and the note go; but this example will serve to illustrate the defect, or at least the danger, which attends Tennyson's method of working up his pictures. There is a temptation to introduce too many details from the remembered or recorded "rough sketches," to crowd the canvas, to use bits of description which, however beautiful in themselves, do not always add to the strength of the picture, and sometimes even give it an air of distracting splendour. Ornateness is a fault from which Tennyson is not free. In spite of his careful revision there are still some red-winged cicadas left in his verse. There are passages in *The Princess*, in "Enoch Arden," and in some of the *Idylls of the King*, for example, which are bewildering in their opulence.

But on the other hand it must be said that very often this richness of detail is precisely the effect which he wishes to produce, and in certain poems, like "Recollections of the Arabian Nights," "The Lotos-Eaters," and "The Palace of Art," it enhances the mystical, dream-like atmosphere in which the subject is conceived. If he sometimes puts in too many touches, he seldom, if ever, makes use of any that is not in harmony with the fundamental tone, the colour-key of his picture. Notice the accumulation of dark images of loneliness and desertion in "Mariana," the cold, gray sadness and weariness of the landscape in "The Dying Swan," and the serene rapture that clothes the earth with emerald and the sea with sapphire in the song of triumphant love in *Maud*, I, xviii.

There are passages in Tennyson's verse where his direct vision of nature is illumined by his memory of the things that other poets have written when looking at the same scene. Thus "Frater Ave atque Vale" is filled, as it should be, with touches from Catullus. But how delicate is the art with which they are blended and harmonized, how exquisite the shimmer of the argent-leaved orchards which Tennyson adds in the last line,

Sweet Catullus's all-but-island, *olive-silvery Sirmio!*

In "The Daisy" (a series of pictures from an Italian journey made with his wife in 1851, recalled to the poet's memory by finding, between the leaves of a book which he was reading in Edinburgh, a daisy plucked on the Splügen Pass), we find literary and historical reminiscences interwoven with descriptions. At Cogoleto he remembers the young Columbus who was born there. On Lake Como, which Virgil praised in the *Georgics*, he recalls

The rich Virgilian rustic measure
Of Lari Maxume, all the way.

At Varennna the story of Queen Theodolind comes back to him. There are critics who profess to regard such allusions and reminiscences as indicating a lack of originality in a poet. But why? Tennyson saw Italy not with the eyes of a peasant, but with the enlarged and sensitive vision of a scholar. The associations of the past entered into his perception of the spirit of place. New colours glowed on

tower, or high hill-convent, seen
A light amid its olives green ;
Or olive-hoary cape in ocean ;
Or rosy blossom in hot ravine,

because he remembered the great things that had been done and suffered in the land through which he was passing. Is not the landscape of imagination as real as the landscape of optics? Must a man be ignorant in order to be original? Is true poetry possible only to him who looks at nature with a mind as bare as if he had never opened a book? Milton did not think so.

Tennyson's use of nature as the great source of poetic images and figures was for the most part immediate and direct; but often his vision was quickened and broadened by memories of what the great poets had seen and sung. Yet when he borrowed, here and there, a phrase, an epithet, from one of them, it was never done blindly or carelessly. He always verified his references to nature. The phrase borrowed is sure to be a true one, chosen with a delicate feeling for the best, translated with unfailing skill, and enhanced in beauty and significance by the setting which he gives to it.

(2.) For subjects, plots, and illustrations Tennyson turned often to the literature of the past. His range of reading, even in boyhood, was wide and various, as the notes to *Poems by Two Brothers* show. At the University he was not only a close student of the Greek and Latin classics, but a diligent reader

of the English poets and philosophers, and a fair Italian scholar. In the years after he left college we find him studying Spanish and German. In later life he kept up his studies with undiminished ardour. In 1854 he was learning Persian, translating Homer and Virgil to his wife, and reading Dante with her. In 1867 he was working over *Job*, *The Song of Solomon* and *Genesis*, in Hebrew. He takes the themes of "The Lotos-Eaters" and "The Sea-Fairies" from Homer; "The Death of Cœnone" from Quintus Calaber; "Tiresias" from Euripides; "Tithonus" from an Homeric Hymn; "Demeter" and "Cœnone" from Ovid; "Lucretius" from St. Jerome; "St. Simeon Stylites" and "St. Telemachus" from Theodoret; "The Cup" from Plutarch; "A Dream of Fair Women" from Chaucer; "Mariana" from Shakespeare; "The Lover's Tale" and "The Falcon" from Boccaccio; "Ulysses" from Dante; "The Revenge" from Sir Walter Raleigh; "The Brook" from Goethe; "The Voyage of Maeldune" from Joyce's *Old Celtic Romances*; "Akbar's Dream" from the Persian, and "Locksley Hall" from the Arabic; "Romney's Remorse" from Hayden's *Life of Romney*; "Columbus" from Washington Irving. In the *Idylls of the King* he has drawn upon Sir Thomas Malory, the *Mabinogion* of Lady Charlotte Guest, and the old French romances. His allusions and references to the Bible are many and beautiful. (See *The Poetry of Tennyson*, p. 245 and Appendix.) But he never wrote a whole poem upon a scriptural subject, except a couple of Byronic imitations in *Poems by Two Brothers*.

To understand his method of using a subject taken from literature it may be well to study a few examples.

The germ of "Ulysses" is found in the following passage from Dante's *Inferno*, xxvi, 90-129, where, in the eighth Bolgia, Ulysses addresses the two poets:—

“ When I escaped
From Circe, who beyond a circling year
Had held me near Caieta by her charms,
Ere thus Æneas yet had named the shore ;
Nor fondness for my son, nor reverence
Of my old father, nor return of love,
That should have crown'd Penelope with joy,
Could overcome in me the zeal I had
To explore the world, and search the ways of life,
Man's evil and his virtue. Forth I sail'd
Into the deep illimitable main,
With but one bark, and the small faithful band
That yet cleaved to me. As Iberia far,
Far as Morocco, either shore I saw,
And the Sardinian and each isle beside
Which round that ocean bathes. Tardy with age
Were I and my companions, when we came
To the strait pass, where Hercules ordain'd
The boundaries not be overstepp'd by man.
The walls of Seville to my right I left,
On the other hand already Ceuta passed.
‘ Oh brothers ! ’ I began, ‘ who to the west
Through perils without number now have reach'd ;
To this the short remaining watch, that yet
Our senses have to wake, refuse not proof
Of the unpeopled world, following the track
Of Phœbus. Call to mind from whence ye sprang.
Ye were not form'd to live the life of brutes,
But virtue to pursue and knowledge high.’
With these few words I sharpen'd for the voyage
The mind of my associates, that I then
Could scarcely have withheld them. To the dawn
Our poop we turn'd, and for the witless flight
Made our oars wings, still gaining on the left.
Each star of the other pole night now beheld,
And ours so low, that from the ocean floor
It rose not.”

Cary's translation (1806).

The central motive of the poem is undoubtedly contained in this passage : the ardent longing for action, for experience, for brave adventure, persisting in Ulysses to the very end of life. This Tennyson renders in his poem with absolute fidelity. But he departs from the original in several points. First, he makes the poem a dramatic monologue, or character-piece, spoken by Ulysses at Ithaca to his old companions. Second, he intensifies the dramatic contrast between the quiet narrow existence on the island (ll. 1-5 ; 33-43) and the free, joyous, perilous life for which Ulysses longs (ll. 11-32). Third, he adds glimpses of natural scenery in wonderful harmony with the spirit of the poem (ll. 2, 44, 45, 54-61). Fourth, he brings out with extraordinary vividness the feeling which he tells us was in his own heart when he wrote the poem, "the need of going forward and braving the struggle of life."

Naturally enough many phrases are used which recall classic writers. "The rainy Hyades" belong to Virgil : the rowers "sitting well in order," to Homer. To "rust unburnish'd" (l. 23) is an improved echo from the speech of Shakespeare's Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*. All this adds to the *vraisemblance* of the poem. It is the art by which the poet evokes in our minds the associations with which literature has surrounded the figure of Ulysses, a distinct personality, an enduring type in the world of imagination. The proof of the poet's strength lies in his ability to meet the test of comparison between his own work and that classic background of which his allusions frankly remind us, and in his power to add something new, vivid, and individual to the picture which has been painted from so many different points of view by the greatest artists. This test, it seems to me, Tennyson endures magnificently. His Ulysses is not unworthy to rank with the wanderer of Homer, of Dante, of Shakespeare. No lines of theirs are larger than Tennyson's —

Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
 Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
 For ever and for ever when I move.

Nor has any poet embodied "the unconquerable mind of man" more nobly than in the final lines of this poem : —

Tho' much is taken, much abides ; and tho'
 We are not now that strength which in old days
 Mov'd earth and heaven ; that which we are, we are ;
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

A poem of very different character is "A Dream of Fair Women," written when the æsthetic impulse was strongest in Tennyson. The suggestion came from Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*. How full and deep and nobly melancholy are the chords with which Tennyson enriches the dream-music to which Chaucer's poem gives the key-note : —

In every land
 I saw, wherever light illumineth,
 Beauty and anguish walking hand in hand
 The downward slope to death.

Those far-renowned brides of ancient song
 Peopled the hollow dark, like burning stars,
 And I heard sounds of insult, shame, and wrong,
 And trumpets blown for wars.

Then follows a passage full of fresh and exquisite descriptions of nature, the scenery of his dream : —

Enormous elm-tree-boles did stoop and lean
 Upon the dusky brushwood underneath
 Their broad curved branches, fledged with clearest green,
 New from its silken sheath.

.

I knew the flowers, I knew the leaves, I knew
The tearful glimmer of the languid dawn
On those long, rank, dark wood-walks drench'd in dew,
Leading from lawn to lawn.

The smell of violets, hidden in the green,
Pour'd back into my empty soul and frame
The times when I remember to have been
Joyful and free from blame.

This is Tennyson's own manner, recognizable, imitable, but not easily equalled. Now come the fair women who people his visionary forest. Each one speaks to him and reveals herself by the lyric disclosure of her story. Only in one case—that of Rosamond—does the speaker utter her name. In all the others, it is by some touch of description made familiar to us by "ancient song," that the figure is recognized. Iphigenia tells how she stood before the altar in Aulis, and saw her sorrowing father, and the waiting ships, and the crowd around her, and the knife which was to shed the victim's blood. (*Lucretius, De Rerum Natura*, i, 85 ff.) Cleopatra recalls the nights of revelry with Mark Antony (Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act i, sc. iv), his wild love (Act iv, sc. viii), her queenly suicide, robed and crowned, with the bite of the aspic on her breast (Act v, sc. ii). Jephtha's Daughter repeats the song with which she celebrated Israel's victory over Ammon (*Judges*, xi). The dream rounds itself into royal splendour, glittering with gems from legend and poetry: then it fades, never to be repeated,—

How eagerly I sought to strike
Into that wondrous track of dreams again !
But no two dreams are like.

Yet another type of subject taken from literature is found in "Dora." Mr. J. Churton Collins says "The whole plot . . . to the minutest details is taken from a prose story of Miss

Mitford's. . . . That the poet's indebtedness to the novel has not been intimated, is due no doubt to the fact that Tennyson, like Gray, leaves his commentators to track him to his raw material."¹ To understand the carelessness of Mr. Collins as a critic it is only necessary to point out the fact that the reference to Miss Mitford's story was distinctly given in a note to the first edition of the poem in 1842. But to appreciate fully the bold inaccuracy of his general statement one needs to read the pastoral of "Dora Creswell," in *Our Village*, side by side with Tennyson's "Dora." In Miss Mitford's story Dora is a little girl; in Tennyson's poem she is a young woman. Miss Mitford tells nothing of the conflict between the old farmer and his son about the proposed marriage with Dora; Tennyson makes it prominent in the working out of the plot. Miss Mitford makes the son marry the delicate daughter of a school-mistress; but in Tennyson's poem his choice falls on Mary Morrison, a labourer's daughter, and, as the poem implies, a vigorous, healthy, independent girl. In Miss Mitford's story there is no trace of Dora's expulsion from the old farmer's house after she has succeeded, by a stratagem, in making him receive his little grandson, Mary's child; but Tennyson makes this the turning point of the most pathetic part of his poem,—Dora's winning of Mary's love, and their resolve that they will live together and bring up the child free from the influence of the old farmer's hardness. When the old man at last gives way, and takes Mary and Dora and the child home, Tennyson adds the final touch of insight to the little drama :—

So those four abode
 Within one house together; and as years
 Went forward Mary took another mate;
But Dora lived unmarried till her death.

¹ J. Churton Collins, *Illustrations of Tennyson*. Chatto and Windus, 1891.

The entire poem is written in the simplest language. It does not contain a single simile, nor a word used in an unfamiliar sense. Wordsworth said, "Mr. Tennyson, I have been endeavouring all my life to write a pastoral like your 'Dora,' and have not succeeded." The contrast between the prose story with its abundance of pretty details, and the poem in beauty unadorned, illustrates the difference between neat work and fine work.

The vivifying power of Tennyson's imagination is nowhere shown more clearly than in the great use which he makes of comparatively small hints and phrases from other writers. In his hands they seem to expand. They are lifted up, animated, ennobled.

A good illustration of this kind of work may be seen in the way in which he handles the material taken from Sir Thomas Malory in the *Morte d'Arthur*. In Malory the King's rebuke to the unfaithful knight runs thus: "Ah, traitor untrue, now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that, thou that hast been to me so lief and dear? And thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the richness of the sword!" In Tennyson a new dramatic splendour enters into the reproach:—

'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou are,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldest betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:

But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

In Malory the King's parting address, spoken from the barge, is: "Comfort thyself, and do as well as thou may'st, for in me is no trust for to trust in; for I will into the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound: and if thou hear never more of me pray for my soul." In Tennyson these few words become the germ of the great passage beginning

'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world,'—

and closing with one of the noblest utterances in regard to prayer that can be found in the world's literature.

Malory says, "And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge, he wept and wailed, and so took the forest." Tennyson makes us see the dark vessel moving away:—

The barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

The difference here is between the seed of poetry and the flower fully unfolded.

Instances of the same enlarging and transforming power of Tennyson's genius may be noted in "The Revenge." Again and again he takes a bare fact given by Sir Walter Raleigh, or Froude, and makes it flash a sudden lightning or roar a majestic thunder through the smoke of the wild sea-fight. The whole poem is scrupulously exact in its fidelity

to the historical records, but it lifts the story on strong wings into the realm of vivid imagination. We do not merely hear about it: we see it, we feel it.

Another illustration is found in "The Lotos-Eaters," lines 156-167. This is expanded from Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, iii, 15. "The divinity of the gods is revealed, and their tranquil abodes which neither winds do shake, nor clouds drench with rains, nor snow congealed by sharp frosts harms with hoary fall: an ever cloudless ether o'ercanopies them, and they laugh with light shed largely round. Nature too supplies all their wants and nothing ever impairs their peace of mind." But the vivid contrast between this luxurious state of *dolce far niente* and the troubles, toils, and conflicts of human life, is added by Tennyson, and gives a new significance to the passage.

We come now to Tennyson's use of the raw material lying close at hand, as yet untouched by the shaping spirit of literature,—newspaper stories, speeches, tales of the country-side, legends and phrases passing from lip to lip, suggestions from conversations and letters. He was quick to see the value of things that came to him in this way, and at the same time, as a rule, most clear in his discrimination between that which was merely interesting or striking, and that which was available for the purposes of poetry, and more particularly of such poetry as he could write. He did not often make Wordsworth's mistake of choosing themes in themselves trivial like "Alice Fell" or "Goody Blake," or themes involving an incongruous and ridiculous element, like "Peter Bell" or "The Idiot Boy." If the subject was one that had a humourous aspect, he gave play to his sense of humour in treating it. If it was serious, he handled it in a tragic or in a pathetic way, according to the depth of feeling which it naturally involved. Illustrations of these different methods may easily be found among his poems.

The "Northern Farmer (Old Style)" was suggested by a story which his great-uncle told him about a Lincolnshire farm-bailiff who said, when he was dying, "God A'mighty little knows what He's aboot, a-takin' me, an' 'Squire'll be so mad an' all!" From this saying, Tennyson declares, he conjectured the whole man, depicted as he is with healthy vigour and kindly humour. It was the remark of a rich neighbour, "When I canters my 'erse along the ramper I 'ears *propetty, propetty, propetty,*" that suggested the contrasting character-piece, the "Northern Farmer (New Style)." The poem called "The Church-Warden and the Curate" was made out of a story told to the poet by the Rev. H. D. Rawnsley.¹ "The Grandmother" was suggested in a letter from Benjamin Jowett giving the saying of an old lady, "The spirits of my children always seem to hover about me." "The Northern Cobbler" was founded on a true story which Tennyson heard in his youth. "Owd Roä" was the poet's version of a report that he had read in a newspaper about a black retriever which saved a child from a burning house. To the end of his life he kept his familiarity with the Lincolnshire variety of English, and delighted to read aloud his verses written in that racy and resonant dialect, which is now, unfortunately, rapidly being lost in the dull march of improvement.

Turning from these *genre*-pieces, we find two of his most powerful ballads, one intensely tragic, the other irresistibly pathetic, based upon incidents related in contemporary periodicals. In a penny magazine called *Old Brighton* he read a story of a young man named Rooke who was hanged in chains for robbing the mail some time near the close of the eighteenth century. "When the elements had caused the clothes and flesh to decay, his aged mother, night after night, in all weathers, and

¹ *Memories of the Tennysons*, by H. D. Rawnsley, MacLehose, Glasgow, 1900, pp. 113 ff.

the more tempestuous the weather the more frequent the visits, made a sacred pilgrimage to the lonely spot on the Downs, and it was noticed that on her return she always brought something away with her in her apron. Upon being watched, it was discovered that the bones of the hanging man were the objects of her search, and as the wind and rain scattered them on the ground she conveyed them to her home. There she kept them, and, when the gibbet was stripped of its horrid burden, in the dead silence of the night, she interred them in the hallowed enclosure of Old Shoreham Churchyard." This is the tale. Imagine what Byron would have made of it, or Shelley, if we may judge by the gruesome details of the second part of "The Sensitive Plant." But Tennyson goes straight to the heart of the passion of motherhood, surviving shame and sorrow, conquering fear and weakness in that withered mother's breast. She tells her story in a dramatic lyric, a naked song of tragedy, a solitary, trembling war-cry of indomitable love. Against this second Rizpah, greater in her heroism than even the Hebrew mother whose deeds are told in the Book of Samuel, all the forces of law and church and society are arrayed. But she will not be balked of her human rights. She will hope that somewhere there is mercy for her boy. She will gather his bones from shame and lay them to rest in consecrated ground.

Flesh of my flesh was gone, but bone of my bone was left—
I stole them all from the lawyers—and you, will you call it a theft?
My baby, the bones that had suck'd me, the bones that had laugh'd and
had cried,—
Theirs? O no! They are mine—not theirs—they had moved in my
side.

"In the Children's Hospital" is a poem as tender as "Rizpah" is passionate. The story was told to Tennyson by Miss Mary Gladstone. An outline of it was printed in a parochial magazine under the title "Alice's Christmas Day."

The theme is the faith and courage of a child in the presence of pain and death. That the poet at seventy years of age should be able to enter so simply, so sincerely, so profoundly into the sweet secret of a suffering child's heart, is a marvellous thing. After all, there must be something moral and spiritual in true poetic genius. It is not mere intellectual power. It is temperament, it is sympathy, it is that power to put oneself in another's place, which lies so close to the root of the Golden Rule.



IV

TENNYSON'S REVISION OF HIS
TEXT

Vos, o

*Pompilius sanguis, carmen reprehendite, quod non
Multa dies et multa litura coërcuit, atque
Perfectum decies non castigavit ad unguem.*

HORACE: *De Arte Poetica*, 291-294.

IV

TENNYSON'S REVISION OF HIS TEXT

THE changes which a poet makes, from time to time, in the text of his poems may be taken in part as a measure of his power of self-criticism, and in part as a record of the growth of his mind. It is true, of course, that a man may prefer to put his new ideas altogether into new poems and leave the old ones untouched ; true also that the creative impulse may be so much stronger than the critical as to make him impatient of the *limæ labor et mora*. This was the case with Robert Browning. There was a time when he made a point of turning out a poem every day. When reproached for indifference to form he said that "the world must take him as it found him."

But Tennyson was a constant, careful corrector of his own verse. He held that "An artist should get his workmanship as good as he can, and make his work as perfect as possible. A small vessel, built on fine lines, is likely to float further down the stream of time than a big raft." He was keenly sensitive to the subtle effects of rhythm, the associations of words, the beauty of form. The deepening of thought and feeling which came to him with the experience of life did not make him indifferent to the technics of his craft as a poet. Indeed it seemed to intensify his desire for perfection. The more he had to say the more carefully he wished to say it.

The first and most important revision of his work began in the period of his greatest spiritual and intellectual growth, immediately after the death of his friend Hallam. The results

of it were seen in the early poems, republished in the two volumes of 1842. From this time forward there were many changes in the successive editions of his poems. *The Princess*, published in 1847, was slightly altered in 1848, thoroughly revised in 1850 (when the intercalary songs were added), and considerably enlarged in 1851. The "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," printed as a pamphlet in 1852, was immediately revised in 1853, and again much altered when it appeared in the same volume with *Maud* in 1855. As late as August 1892, I heard Tennyson questioning whether the line describing the cross of St. Paul's

That shines over city and river—

should be changed to read,

That shines upon city and river.

There were general revisions in 1872 (The Library Edition), in 1874 (The Cabinet Edition), in 1884 (The Globe Edition), in 1886 (A New Library Edition, in ten volumes), in 1889, and in 1891. The complete single-volume edition, "with last alterations," was published in 1894.

In Memoriam received less revision after its first publication than any other of Tennyson's larger poems;¹ probably because it had been so frequently worked over in manuscript. Sixteen years passed between its inception and its appearance in print.

I propose to examine some of Tennyson's changes in his text in order that we may do what none of the critics have yet done,—get a clear idea of their general character and the particular reasons why he made them. These changes may be classified under five heads, descriptive of the different reasons for revision.

¹ Joseph Jacobs, *Tennyson and In Memoriam*, notes 62 verbal changes. Two sections (xxxix, lix) have been added to the poem.

1. *For simplicity and naturalness.* — There was a tincture of archaism in the early diction of Tennyson, an occasional use of far-fetched words, an unfamiliar way of spelling, a general flavour of conscious exquisiteness, which seemed to his maturer judgment to savour of affectation. These blemishes, due to the predominance of the æsthetic impulse, he was careful to remove.

At first, he tells us, he had “an absurd antipathy” to the use of the hyphen; and in 1830 and 1832 he wrote, in “Mariana,” *flowerplots*, *casementcurtain*, *marishmosses*, *silvergreen*; and in “The Palace of Art,” *pleasurehouse*, *sunnywarm*, *torrentbow*, *clearwalled*. In 1842 the despised hyphen was restored to its place, and the compound words were spelled according to common usage. He discarded also his early fashion of accenting the *ed* in the past participle,— *wreathèd*, *blenchèd*, *gleanèd*, etc.

Archaic elisions, like “throne o’ the massive ore” in “Recollections of the Arabian Nights” (l. 146), and “up an’ away” in “Mariana” (l. 50), and “whither away wi’ the singing sail” in “The Sea-Fairies,” were eliminated.

A purified and chastened taste made him prefer, in the “Ode to Memory,”

With plaited alleys of the trailing rose —

[1842]

to

With pleachéd alleys of the trailing rose.

[1830]

In “The Lady of Shalott” he left out some of the more fanciful bits of dress and decoration with which the poem was at first a little overloaded; for example: —

A pearlgarland winds her head:
She leaneth on a velvet bed,
Full royally apparellèd.

In "Mariana" he substituted,

The day
Was sloping toward his western bower,

for

[1842]

The day
Downsloped was westering in his bower.

[1830]

The general result of such alterations as these was to make the poems more simple and straightforward. In the same way we feel that there is great gain in the omission of the stanzas about a balloon which were originally prefixed to "A Dream of Fair Women," and of the elaborate architectural and decorative details which overloaded the first version of "The Palace of Art," and in the compression of the last strophe of "The Lotos-Eaters," with its curious pictures of 'the tuskèd seahorse wallowing in a stripe of grassgreen calm,' and 'the monstrous narwhale swallowing his own foamfountains in the sea.' We can well spare these marine prodigies for the sake of such a line as

Roll'd to starboard, roll'd to larboard, when the surge was seething free.

[1842]

2. *For melody and smoothness.* — It was a constant wish of Tennyson to make his verse easy to read, as musical as possible, except when the sense required a rough or broken rhythm. He had a strong aversion to the hissing sound of the letter *s* when it comes at the end of a word and at the beginning of the next word. He was always trying to get rid of this,— "kicking the geese out of the boat," as he called it,— and he thought that he had succeeded. (*Memoir*, II, p. 14.) But this, of course, was a "flattering unction." It is not difficult to find instances of the double sibilant remaining in his verse : for example in "A Dream of Fair Women" (l. 241) :—

She lock'd her lips : she left me where I stood,

and "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" (l. 23) :—

She seem'd a part of joyous Spring.

But for the most part he was careful to remove it, as in the following cases.

"The Lady of Shalott" (l. 156) :—

A pale, pale corpse she floated by. [1833]

A gleaming shape she floated by. [1842]

"Mariana in the South" (ll. 9, 10) :—

Down in the dry salt-marshes stood
That house darklatticed. [Omitted, 1842]

"Locksley Hall" (l. 182) :—

Let the peoples spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change. [1842]

Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change. [1845]

Alterations were made in order to get rid of unpleasant assonance in blank verse, as in "CEnone" (l. 19) :—

She, leaning on a vine-entwinèd stone. [1833]

She, leaning on a fragment twined with vine. [1842]

Disagreeable alliterations were removed, as in "Mariana" (l. 43) :—

For leagues no other tree did dark. [1830]

For leagues no other tree did mark. [1842]

"Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" (l. 5) :—

When laurel-garlanded leaders fall. [1852]

Mourning when their leaders fall. [1855]

Imperfect rhymes were corrected, as in "Mariana in the South" (l. 85) :—

One dry cicala's summer song
 At night filled all the gallery,
 Backward the latticeblind she flung
 And leaned upon the balcony.

[1833]

At eve a dry cicala sung,
 There came a sound as of the sea ;
 Backward the lattice-blind she flung,
 And lean'd upon the balcony.

[1842]

Incongruous and harsh expressions were removed, as in "The Poet" (l. 45) :—

And in the bordure of her robe was writ
 WISDOM, a name to shake
 Hoar anarchies, as with a thunderfit.

[1830]

And in her raiment's hem was traced in flame
 WISDOM, a name to shake
 All evil dreams of power—a sacred name.

[1842]

Two very delicate and perfect examples of the same kind of improvement are found in the revision of "Claribel" (l. 11) :—

At noon the bee low-hummeth,

[1830]

At noon the wild bee hummeth,

[1842]

and line 17 :—

The fledgling throstle lispetto.

[1830]

The callow throstle lispetto.

[1842]

Some of the alterations in the Wellington Ode are very happy. Line 79 originally read,

And ever-ringing avenues of song.

How much more musical is the present version :—

And ever-echoing avenues of song !

In line 133, “world’s earthquake” was changed to “world-earthquake.” Line 267,—

Hush, the Dead March *sounds* in the people’s ears,—
[1853]

was wonderfully deepened in 1855, when it was altered to

Hush, the Dead March *wails* in the people’s ears.

3. *For clearness of thought.* — The most familiar instance of this kind of revision is in “A Dream of Fair Women.” In 1833 the stanza describing the sacrifice of Iphigenia ended with the lines

One drew a sharp knife thro’ my tender throat ;
Slowly,— and nothing more.

A critic very properly inquired ‘what more she would have.’ The lines were changed to

The bright death quiver’d at the victim’s throat ;
Touch’d; and I knew no more.

There is another curious illustration in “Lady Clara Vere de Vere.” In 1842 lines 49–52 read,

Trust me, Clara Vere de Vere,
From yon blue heavens above us bent
The gardener Adam and his wife
Smile at the claims of long descent.

Line 51 was changed, in 1845, to

The grand old gardener and his wife,

which was both weak and ambiguous. One might fancy (as a young lady of my acquaintance did) that the poet was

speaking of some fine old gardener on the De Vere estate, who had died and gone to heaven. In 1875 Tennyson restored the original and better reading, "The gardener Adam."

A few more illustrations will suffice to show how careful he was to make his meaning clear.

"Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" (l. 157) :—

Of most unbounded reverence and regret.

[1852]

But it is hard to see how reverence can be more than unbounded ; so the line was changed :

Of boundless reverence and regret.

[1853]

Of boundless love and reverence and regret.

[1855]

"The Marriage of Geraint" (l. 70) :—

They sleeping each by *other*.

[1859]

They sleeping each by *either*.

[1874]

"Lancelot and Elaine" (l. 45) :—

And one of these, *the king*, had on a crown.

[1859]

And *he, that once was king*, had on a crown.

[1874]

(L. 168) :—

Thither he made, and *wound* the gateway horn.

[1859]

Thither he made, and *blew* the gateway horn.

[1874]

(L. 1147) :—

Steer'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood.

[1859]

Oar'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood.

[1874]

"Guinevere" (l. 470) :—

To honour his own word as if his God's.

This line was not in the 1859 version. It enhances the solemnity of the oath of initiation into the Round Table.

“The Passing of Arthur” (ll. 462–469) :—

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Ev'n to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

These lines, with others, were added to “Morte d’Arthur,” the original form of this idyll, in order to bring out the distant gleam of hope which is thrown upon the close of the epic by the vision of Arthur’s immortality and the prophecy of his return.

4. *For truth in the description of nature.*—The alterations made for this reason are very many. I give a few examples.

“The Lotos-Eaters” (l. 7) :—

Above the valley burned the *golden* moon.

[1833]

But in the afternoon (l. 3) the moon is of palest silver ; so the line was revised thus :—

Full-faced above the valley stood the moon.

[1842]

In the version of 1833, line 16 was written as follows :—

Three thundercloven thrones of oldest snow.

But in the first place, it is the lightning, not the thunder, which cleaves the mountains ; and in the second place, a snow-peak, even if cloven by lightning, would soon be covered with snow again ; the cleft would be hidden. So the line was changed to

Three silent pinnacles of aged snow.

In "Locksley Hall" (l. 3) the first reading was

'T is the place, and *round the gables*, as of old, the curlews call.
[1842]

But the curlews do not fly close to the roofs of houses, as the swallows do; so the line was changed to

'T is the place, and all around it, as of old, the curlews call.
[1845]

"Mariana" (ll. 3, 4) :—

The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the *peach* to the *gardenwall*.
[1830]

This was not quite characteristic of a Lincolnshire garden; so it was altered in 1863 and 1872 to the present form:—

That held the *pear* to the *gable-wall*.

"The Poet's Song" (l. 9) :—

The swallow stopped as he hunted the bee.
[1842]

But swallows do not hunt bees; so the line was changed to

The swallow stopt as he hunted the fly.
[1884]

"Lancelot and Elaine" (ll. 652, 653) :—

No surer than our falcon yesterday,
Who lost the hern we slipt *him* at.
[1859]

But the female falcon, being larger and fiercer, is the one usually employed in the chase; so *him* was changed to *her*.

There is a very interesting addition to *In Memoriam*, which bears witness to Tennyson's scrupulous desire to be truthful in natural description. Section ii is addressed to an old yew-tree in the graveyard, and contains this stanza:—

O not for thee the glow, the bloom,
Who changest not in any gale,
Nor branding summer suns avail
To touch thy thousand years of gloom.

But, as a matter of fact, the yew has its season of bloom ; and so in Section xxxix, added in 1871, we find these lines :—

To thee too comes the golden hour
When flower is feeling after flower ;
 But Sorrow,—fixt upon the dead,

 And darkening the dark graves of men,—
 What whisper'd from her *lying* lips ?
 Thy gloom *is* kindled at the tips,
 And passes into gloom again.

5. *For deeper meaning and human interest.*—In this respect the revision of “The Palace of Art” is most important. The stanzas added in the later editions of this poem have the effect of intensifying its significance, making the sin of self-centred isolation stand out sharply (ll. 197–204), displaying the scornful contempt of the proud soul for common humanity (ll. 145–160), and throwing over the picture the Pharisee’s robe of moral self-complacency (ll. 205–208). The introduction in 1833 began as follows :

I send you, friend, a sort of allegory,
 (You are an artist and will understand
 Its many lesser meanings).

But in 1842 the lines read

I send you here a sort of allegory,
 (For you will understand it).

The poet no longer addresses his work to an artist : he speaks more broadly to man as man. For the same reason he omits a great many of the purely decorative stanzas, and concentrates the attention on the spiritual drama.

The addition of the *Conclusion* to “The May Queen” (1842) is another instance of Tennyson’s enrichment of his work with warmer human interest. In the first two parts

there is nothing quite so intimate in knowledge of the heart as the lines

O look ! the sun begins to rise, the heavens are in a glow;
He shines upon a hundred fields, *and all of them I know.*

There is nothing quite so true to the simplicity of childlike faith as the closing verses :—

To lie within the light of God, as I lie upon your breast—
And the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.

The sixth strophe of the Choric Song in “The Lotos-Eaters,” beginning

Dear is the memory of our wedded lives,
And dear the last embraces of our wives
And their warm tears,—

was added in 1842.

In the “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington,” lines 266–270 were added after the first edition :—

On God and Godlike men we build our trust.
Hush, the Dead March wails in the people’s ears :
The dark crowd moves, and there are sobs and tears :
The black earth yawns : the mortal disappears ;
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

This passage brings a deep note of natural emotion into the poem. The physical effect of the actual interment, the sight of the yawning grave, the rattle of the handful of earth thrown upon the coffin, are vividly expressed.

A noteworthy change for the sake of expressing a deeper human feeling occurs in “The Lady of Shalott.” The original form of the last stanza was merely picturesque : it described the wonder and perplexity of “the wellfed wits at Camelot”

when they looked upon the dead maiden in her funeral barge and read the parchment on her breast :—

“*The web was woven curiously,
The charm is broken utterly,
Draw near and fear not—this is I,
The Lady of Shalott.*”

[1833]

But the revised version makes them “cross themselves for fear,” and brings the knight for secret love of whom the maiden died to look upon her face :—

But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, ‘She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott.’

The addition of the songs to *The Princess* (1850) must be regarded as evidence of a desire to deepen the meaning of the story. Tennyson said distinctly that he wished to make people see that the child was the heroine of the poem. The songs are a great help in this direction. In the *Idylls of the King* Tennyson took pains, as he went on with the series, to eliminate all traces of the old tradition which made Modred the son of King Arthur and his half-sister Bellicent, thus sweeping away the taint of incest from the story, and revealing the catastrophe as the result of the unlawful love of Lancelot and Guinevere. (See *The Poetry of Tennyson*, pp. 171 ff.) He introduced many allegorical details into the later Idylls. And he endeavoured to enhance the epic dignity and significance of the series by inserting the closing passages of “The Coming of Arthur” and “The Passing of Arthur,” which present clearly the idea of a great kingdom rising under Arthur’s leadership and falling into ruin with his defeat.

A general study of the changes which Tennyson made in the text of his poems will show, beyond a doubt, not only that he was sensitive to the imperfections in his work and ready to profit, at least to a certain extent, by the suggestions of critics; but also that his skill as an artist was refined by use, and that his thoughts of life and his sympathies with mankind deepened and broadened with advancing years. Thus there was a compensation for the loss of something of the delicate, inimitable freshness, the novel and enchanting charm which breathed from the lyrics of his youth.

V

THE QUALITIES OF TENNYSON'S
POETRY

“ His music was the south-wind’s sigh,
His lamp, the maiden’s downcast eye,
And ever the spell of beauty came
And turned the drowsy world to flame.
By lake and stream and gleaming hall
And modest copse and the forest tall,
Where’er he went, the magic guide
Kept its place by the poet’s side.
Said melted the days like cups of pearl,
Served high and low, the lord and the churl,
Loved harebells nodding on a rock,
A cabin hung with curling smoke,
Ring of axe or hum of wheel
Or gleam which use can paint on steel,
And huts and tents ; nor loved he less
Stately lords in palaces,
Princely women hard to please,
Fenced by form and ceremony,
Decked by rites and courtly dress
And etiquette of gentillesse.

He came to the green ocean’s brim
And saw the wheeling sea-birds skim,
Summer and winter, o’er the wave
Like creatures of a skiey mould
Impassible to heat or cold.
He stood before the tumbling main
With joy too tense for sober brain ;

And he, the bard, a crystal soul
Sphere and concentric with the whole.”

EMERSON : *The Poetic Gift.*

V

THE QUALITIES OF TENNYSON'S POETRY

IF an unpublished poem by Tennyson — say an idyll of chivalry, a classical character-piece, a modern dramatic lyric, or even a little song — were discovered, and given out without his name, it would be easy, provided it belonged to his best work, to recognize it as his. But it is by no means easy to define just what it is that makes his poetry recognizable. It is not the predominance of a single trait or characteristic. If that were the case, it would be a simple matter to put one's finger upon the hall-mark. It is not a fixed and exaggerated mannerism. That is the sign of the Tennysonian, rather than of their master. His style varies from the luxuriance of "A Dream of Fair Women" to the simplicity of "The Oak," from the lightness of "The Brook" to the stateliness of "Guinevere." There is as much difference of manner between "The Gardener's Daughter" and "Ulysses," as there is between Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper" and his "Dion."

The most remarkable thing about Tennyson's poetry as a whole is that it expresses so fully and so variously the qualities of a many-sided and well-balanced nature. But when we look at the poems separately we see that, in almost every case, the quality which is most closely related to the subject of the poem plays the leading part in giving it colour and form. There is a singular fitness, a harmonious charm in his work, not unlike that which distinguishes the painting of Titian. It is not, indeed, altogether spontaneous and unstudied. It has the effect of choice, of fine selection. But it is inevitable enough

in its way. The choice being made, it would be hard to better it. The words are the right words, and each stands in its right place.

The one thing that cannot justly be said of it, it seems to me, is precisely what Tennyson says in a certain place :—

I do but sing because I must,
And pipe but as the linnets sing.

That often seems true of Burns and Shelley, sometimes of Keats. But it is not true of Milton, of Gray, of Tennyson. They do not pour forth their song

“In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.”

I shall endeavour in the remaining pages of this introduction to describe and illustrate some of the qualities which are found in Tennyson's poetry.

1. His diction is lucid, suggestive, melodious. He avoids, for the most part, harsh and strident words, intricate constructions, strange rhymes, startling contrasts. He chooses expressions which have a natural rhythm, an easy flow, a clear meaning. He has a rare mastery of metrical resources. Many of his lyrics seem to be composed to a musical cadence which his inward ear has caught in some happy phrase.

He prefers to use those metrical forms which are free and fluent, and in which there is room for subtle modulations and changes. In the stricter modes of verse he is less happy. The sonnet, the Spenserian stanza, the heroic couplet, the swift couplet (octosyllabic), — these he seldom uses, and little of his best work is done in these forms. Even in four-stress iambic triplets, the metre in which “The Two Voices” is written, he seems constrained and awkward. He is at his best in the long swinging lines of “Locksley Hall” (eight-stress trochaic couplets) or in a free blank verse (five-stress iambic), which admits all the Miltonic liberty of shifted and hovering accents,

grace-notes, omitted stresses, and the like ; or in mixed measures like "The Revenge" and the Wellington Ode, where the rhythm is now iambic and now trochaic ; or in metres which he invented, like "The Daisy," or revived, like *In Memoriam* ; or in little songs like "Break, break, break," and "The Bugle Song," where the melody is as unmistakable and as indefinable as the feeling.

He said, "Englishmen *will* spoil English verses by scanning them when they are reading, and they confound accent with quantity." "In a blank verse you can have from three up to eight beats ; but, if you vary the beats unusually, your ordinary newspaper critic sets up a howl." (*Memoir*, II, 12, 14.) He liked the "run-on" from line to line, the overflow from stanza to stanza. Much of his verse is impossible to analyze if you insist on looking for regular feet according to the classic models ; but if you read it according to the principle which Coleridge explained in the preface to "Christabel," by "counting the accents, not the syllables," you will find that it falls into a natural rhythm. It seems as if his own way of reading it aloud, in a sort of chant, were almost inevitable.

This close relation of his verse to music may be felt in *Maud*, and in his perfect little lyrics like the autumnal "Song," "The Throstle," "Tears, idle tears," "Sweet and low," and "Far — far — away." Here also we see the power of suggestiveness, the atmospheric effect, in his diction. Every word is in harmony with the central emotion of the song, vague, delicate, intimate, mingled of sweetness and sadness.

The most beautiful illustration of this is "Crossing the Bar." Notice how the metre, in each stanza, rises to the long third line, and sinks away again in the shorter fourth line. The poem is in two parts ; the first stanza corresponding, in every line, to the third ; the second stanza, to the fourth. In each division of the song there is first, a clear, solemn, tranquil

note,—a reminder that the day is over and it is time to depart. The accent hovers over the words “sunset” and “twilight,” and falls distinctly on “star” and “bell.” Then come two thoughts of sadness, the “moaning of the bar,” the “sadness of farewell,” from which the voyager prays to be delivered. The answer follows in the two pictures of peace and joy,—the full, calm tide bearing him homeward,—the vision of the unseen Pilot who has guided and will guide him to the end of his voyage. Every image in the poem is large and serene. Every word is simple, clear, harmonious.

The movement of a very different kind of music — martial, sonorous, thrilling — may be heard in “The Charge of the Heavy Brigade.”

Up the hill, up the hill,
Gallop the gallant three hundred, the Heavy Brigade,—

reproduces with extraordinary force the breathless, toilsome, thundering assault.

His verse often seems to adapt itself to his meaning with an almost magical effect. Thus, in the Wellington Ode, when the spirit of Nelson welcomes the great warrior to his tomb in St. Paul’s,—

Who is he that cometh, like an honour’d guest,
With banner and with music, with soldier and with priest,
With a nation weeping, and breaking on my rest? —

we can almost hear the funeral march and see the vast, sorrowful procession. In “Locksley Hall,” —

Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might ; Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, pass’d in music out of sight,—

what value there is in the word “trembling” and in the slight secondary pause that follows it ; how the primary pause in the preceding bar, dividing it, emphasizes the word “Self.” In

The Princess there is a line describing one of the curious Chinese ornaments in which a series of openwork balls are carved one inside of another :—

Laborious orient ivory sphere in sphere.

One can almost see the balls turning and glistening. In the poem “To Virgil” there is a verse praising the great Mantuan’s lordship over language :—

All the charm of all the Muses often flowering in a lonely word.

This illustrates the very quality that it describes. “Flowering” is the magical word.

But it is not so often the “lonely word” that is wonderful in Tennyson, as it is the company of words which blossom together in colour-harmony, the air of lucid beauty that envelops the many features of a landscape and blends them in a perfect picture. This is his peculiar charm ; and it is illustrated in many passages, but nowhere better than in *In Memoriam*, lxxxvi, —

Sweet after showers, ambrosial air,
That rollest from the gorgeous gloom
Of evening over brake and bloom
And meadow,—

and in the perfect description of autumn’s sad tranquillity, Section xi, —

Calm on the seas, and silver sleep,
And waves that sway themselves in rest,
And dead calm in that noble breast
Which heaves but with the heaving deep.

2. Tennyson’s closeness of observation, fidelity of description, and felicity of expression in nature-poetry have often been praised. In spite of his near-sightedness he saw things with great clearness and accuracy. All his senses seem to

have been alert and true. In this respect he was better fitted to be an observer than Wordsworth, in whom the colour-sense was not especially vivid, and whose poetry shows little or no evidence of the sense of fragrance, although his ears caught sounds with wonderful fineness and his eyes were quick to note forms and movements. Bayard Taylor once took a walk with Tennyson in the Isle of Wight, and afterward wrote : "During the conversation with which we beguiled the way I was struck with the variety of his knowledge. Not a little flower on the downs, which the sheep had spared, escaped his notice, and the geology of the coast, both terrestrial and submarine, was perfectly familiar to him. I remembered the remark I once heard from the lips of a distinguished English author (Thackeray), that 'Tennyson was the wisest man he knew,' and could well believe that he was sincere in making it."

But Tennyson's relation to nature differed from Wordsworth's in another respect than that which has been mentioned, and one in which the advantage lies with the earlier poet. Wordsworth had a personal intimacy with nature, a confiding and rejoicing faith in her unity, her life, and her deep beneficence, which made him able to say : —

" This prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her: 't is her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings."

There is no utterance like this in Tennyson's poetry. He had not a profound and permanent sense of that "something far more deeply interfused" in nature which gives her a consoling, liberating, nourishing power,—a maternal power. In "Enoch Arden" the solitude of nature, even in her richest beauty, is terrible. In "Locksley Hall" the disappointed lover calls not on Mother-Nature, but on his "Mother-Age," the age of progress, of advancing knowledge, to comfort and help him. In *Maud* the unhappy hero says, not that he will turn to nature, but that he will 'bury himself in his books.' Whether it was because Tennyson saw the harsher, sterner aspects of nature more clearly than Wordsworth did, or because he had more scientific knowledge, or because he was less simple and serene, it remains true that he did not have that steady and glad confidence in her vital relation to the spirit of man, that overpowering joy in surrender to her purifying and moulding influence, which Wordsworth expressed in the "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey," in 1798, and in "Devotional Incitements" in 1832, and in many other poems written between these dates. Yet it must be observed that Wordsworth himself, in later life, felt some abatement of his unquestioning and all-sufficing faith in nature, or at least admitted the need of something beside her ministry to satisfy all the wants of the human spirit. For in "An Evening Voluntary" (1834), he writes:—

"By grace divine,
Not otherwise, O Nature! are we thine."

Mr. Stopford Brooke has observed that the poetry of both Scott and Byron contains many utterances of delight in the wild and solitary aspects of nature; and that we find little or nothing of this kind in Tennyson. From this Mr. Brooke infers that he had less real love of nature for her own sake

than the two poets named. The inference is not well grounded.

Both Scott and Byron were very dependent upon social pleasure for their enjoyment of life,—much more so than Tennyson. Any one who will read Byron's letters may judge how far his professed passion for the solitudes of the ocean and the Alps was sincere, and how far it was a pose. Indeed, in one place, if I mistake not, he maintains the theory that it is the presence of man's work — the ship on the ocean, the city among the hills — that lends the chief charm to nature.

Tennyson was one of the few great poets who have proved their love of nature by living happily in the country. From boyhood up he was well content to spend long, lonely days by the seashore, in the woods, on the downs. It is true that as a rule his temperament found more joy in rich landscapes and gardens of opulent bloom, than in the wild, the savage, the desolate. But no man who was not a true lover of nature for her own sake could have written the "Ode to Memory," or this stanza from "Early Spring" :—

The woods with living airs
How softly fann'd,
Light airs from where the deep,
All down the sand,
Is breathing in his sleep,
Heard by the land.

Nor is there any lack of feeling for the sublime in such a poem as "The Voice and the Peak" :—

The voice and the Peak
Far over summit and lawn,
The lone glow and long roar
Green-rushing from the rosy thrones of dawn !

It would be easy to fill many pages with illustrations of Tennyson's extraordinary vividness of perception and truthfulness

of description in regard to nature. He excels, first of all, in delicate pre-Raphaelite work,— the painting of the flowers in the meadow, the buds on the trees, the movements of waves and streams, the birds at rest and on the wing. Looking at the water, he sees the

Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
Flowing down to Camelot.

[*The Lady of Shalott.*]

With a single touch he gives the aspect of the mill stream : —

The sleepy pool above the dam,
The pool beneath it never still.

[*The Miller's Daughter.*]

He shows us

a shoal
Of darting fish, that on a summer morn
Adown the crystal dykes at Camelot
Come slipping o'er their shadows on the sand,
But if a man who stands upon the brink
But lift a shining hand against the sun,
There is not left the twinkle of a fin
Betwixt the cressy islets white in flower.

[*Geraint and Enid.*]

He makes us see

the waterfall
Which ever sounds and shines,
A pillar of white light upon the wall
Of purple cliffs, aloof descried.

[*Ode to Memory.*]

He makes us hear, through the nearer voice of the stream,

The drumming thunder of the huger fall
At distance,

[*Geraint and Enid.*]

or

The scream of a madden'd beach dragg'd down by the wave.

[*Maud.*]

Does he speak of trees? He knows the difference between
the poplars'

noise of falling showers,

[Lancelot and Elaine.]

and

The dry-tongued laurels' pattering talk,

[Maud.]

and the voice of the cedar,

sighing for Lebanon

In the long breeze that streams to thy delicious East.

[Maud.]

He sees how

A million emeralds break from the ruby-budded lime,

[Maud.]

and how the chestnut-buds begin

To spread into the perfect fan,
Above the teeming ground.

[Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere.]

He has watched the hunting-dog in its restless sleep,—

Like a dog, he hunts in dreams,—

[Locksley Hall.]

and noted how the lonely heron, at sundown,

forgets his melancholy,
Lets down his other leg, and stretching, dreams
Of goodly supper in the distant pool.

[Gareth and Lynette.]

There is a line in *In Memoriam*,—

Flits by the sea-blue bird of March,—

which Tennyson meant to describe the kingfisher. A friend criticised it and said that some other bird must have been intended, because "the kingfisher shoots by, flashes by, but never flits." But, in fact, to *flit*, which means "to move lightly and swiftly," is precisely the word for the motion of this

bird, as it darts along the stream with even wing-strokes, shifting its place from one post to another. Tennyson gives both the colour and the flight of the kingfisher with absolute precision.

But it is not only in this pre-Raphaelite work that his extraordinary skill is shown. He has also the power of rendering vague, wide landscapes, under the menacing shadow of a coming storm, in the calm of an autumnal morning, or in the golden light of sunset. Almost always such landscapes are coloured by the prevailing emotion or sentiment of the poem. Tennyson holds with Coleridge that much of what we see in nature is the reflection of our own life, our inmost feelings :—

“Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud.”

In “The Gardener’s Daughter” Tennyson describes the wedding-garment :—

All the land in flowery squares,
Beneath a broad and equal-blowing wind,
Smelt of the coming summer, as one large cloud
Drew downward: but all else of heaven was pure
Up to the Sun, and May from verge to verge,
And May with me from head to heel.

But in “Guinevere” it is the shroud :—

For all abroad,
Beneath a moon unseen albeit at full,
The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,
Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still.

3. The wide range of human sympathy in Tennyson’s work is most remarkable. The symbolic poem, “Merlin and The Gleam,” describes his poetic life. Following the Gleam,—“the higher poetic imagination,”—he passes from fairy-land into the real world and interprets the characters and conflicts, the labours and longings, of all sorts and conditions of men. He speaks for childhood in “The May Queen” and “In the

Children's Hospital"; for motherhood in "Rizpah" and "Demeter"; for seamen in "The Revenge" and "Columbus" and "The Voyage of Maeldune" and "Enoch Arden"; for soldiers in "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and "The Charge of the Heavy Brigade" and "The Defence of Lucknow"; for philosophers in "Lucretius" and "The Ancient Sage"; for the half-crazed ascetic in "St. Simeon Stylites," and for the fearless reformer in "Sir John Oldcastle"; for the painter in "Romney's Remorse"; for the rustic in the "Northern Farmer"; for religious enthusiasm, active, in "Sir Galahad," and passive, in "St. Agnes' Eve"; for peasant life in "Dora," and for princely life in "The Day-Dream"; for lovers of different types in "Maud" and "Locksley Hall" and "Aylmer's Field" and "Love and Duty" and "Happy" and "Œnone" and "The Lover's Tale" and "Lady Clare."

He is not, it must be admitted, quite as deep, as inward, as searching as Wordsworth is in some of his peasant portraits. There is a revealing touch in "Michael," in "Margaret," in "Resolution and Independence," to which Tennyson rarely, if ever, attains. Nor is there as much individuality and intensity in his pictures as we find in the best of Browning's *dramatis personæ*, like "Saul" and "Rabbi Ben Ezra" and "Andrea del Sarto" and "The Flight of the Duchess." Tennyson brings out in his characters that which is most natural and normal. He does not delight, as Browning does, in discovering the strange, the eccentric. Nor has he Browning's extraordinary acquaintance with the technical details of different arts and trades, and with the singular features of certain epochs of history, like the Renaissance.

But, on the other hand, if Tennyson has less intellectual curiosity in his work, he has more emotional sympathy. His characters are conceived on broader lines; they are more

human and typical. Even when he finds his subject in some classic myth, it is the human element that he brings out. This is the thing that moves him. He studies the scene, the period, carefully and closely in order to get the atmosphere of time and place. But these are subordinate. The main interest, for him, lies in the living person into whose place he puts himself and with whose voice he speaks. Thus in "Tithonus" he dwells on the loneliness of one who must "vary from the kindly race of men" since the gift of "cruel immortality" has been conferred upon him. In "Demeter and Persephone" the most beautiful passage is that in which the goddess-mother tells of her yearning for her lost child.

4. Tennyson's work is marked by frequent reference to the scientific discoveries and social movements of his age. Wordsworth's prophetic vision of the time "when the discoveries of the chemist, the botanist, or mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any upon which it can be employed," because these things and the relations under which they are contemplated will be so familiarized that we shall see that they are "parts of our life as enjoying and suffering beings," — this prediction of the advent of science, transfigured by poetry, as "a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man," was fulfilled, at least in part, in the poetry of Tennyson.

In "The Two Voices" Tennyson alludes to modern osteology :—

Before the little ducts began
To feed thy bones with lime, and ran
Their course, till thou wert also man.

In the twenty-first section of *In Memoriam* he notes the discovery of the satellite of Neptune :—

'When Science reaches forth her arms
To feel from world to world, and charms
Her secret from the latest moon.'

In the twenty-fourth section he speaks of sun-spots : —

The very source and fount of Day
Is dash'd with wandering isles of night.

In the thirty-fifth section he alludes to the process of denudation : —

The sound of streams that swift or slow
Draw down Æonian hills, and sow
The dust of continents to be.

The nebular hypothesis of Laplace and the theory of evolution are conceived and expressed with wonderful imaginative power in the one hundred and eighteenth section. In the fourth section a subtle fact of physical science is translated into an image of poetic beauty : —

Break, thou deep vase of chilling tears,
That grief hath *shaken* into frost !

“ Locksley Hall ” is full of echoes of the scientific inventions and the social hopes of the mid-century. In “ Locksley Hall Sixty Years After ” the old man speaks, with disenchanted spirit, of the failure of many of these hopes and the small value of many of these inventions, but he still holds to the vision of human progress guided by a divine, unseen Power : —

When the schemes and all the systems, Kingdoms and Republics fall,
Something kindlier, higher, holier—all for each and each for all?

All the full-brain, half-brain races, led by Justice, Love, and Truth ;
All the millions one at length with all the visions of my youth ?

.
Earth at last a warless world, a single race, a single tongue—
I have seen her far away—for is not Earth as yet so young?

Every tiger madness muzzled, every serpent passion kill'd,
Every grim ravine a garden, every blazing desert till'd,

Robed in universal harvest up to either pole she smiles,
Universal ocean softly washing all her warless Isles.

5. As in its form, so in its spirit, the poetry of Tennyson is marked by a constant and controlling sense of law and order. He conceives the universe under the sway of great laws, physical and moral, which are in themselves harmonious and beautiful, as well as universal. Disorder, discord, disaster, come from the violation of these laws. Beauty lies not in contrast but in concord. The noblest character is not that in which a single faculty or passion is raised to the highest pitch, but that in which the balance of the powers is kept, and the life unfolds itself in a well-rounded fulness : —

That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before,
But vaster.

Such is the character, which is drawn from memory in the description of Arthur Hallam in *In Memoriam*; and from imagination in the picture of King Arthur in the *Idylls*.

Tennyson belongs in the opposite camp from the poets of revolt. To him such a vision of the swift emancipation of society as Shelley gives in "Prometheus Unbound," or "The Revolt of Islam," was not merely impossible; it was wildly absurd, a dangerous dream. His faith in the advance of mankind rested on two bases; first, his intuitive belief in the benevolence of the general order of the universe : —

Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill : —

and second, his practical confidence in the success — or at least in the immediate usefulness — of the efforts of men to make the world around them better little by little. Evolution, not revolution, was his watchword.

Yet I doubt not thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs,

is his cry in the first "Locksley Hall"; and in the second he says,

Follow Light, and do the Right—for man can half-control his doom—
Till you see the deathless Angel seated in the vacant tomb.

In the patriotic poems we find that Tennyson's love of country is sane, sober, steadfast, thoughtful. He dislikes the "blind hysterics of the Celt," and fears the red "fool-fury of the Seine." He praises England as

A land of settled government,
A land of old and just renown,
Where freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent.

His favourite national heroes are of the Anglo-Saxon type, sturdy, resolute, self-contained, following the path of duty. He rejoices not only in the service which England has rendered to the cause of law-encircled liberty, but in the way in which she has rendered it: —

Whatever harmonies of law
The growing world assume,
Thy work is thine—The single note
From that deep chord which Hampden smote
Will vibrate to the doom.

[England and America in 1782.]

He praises the peaceful reformer as the chief benefactor of his country: —

Not he that breaks the dams, but he
That thro' the channels of the State
Convoys the people's wish, is great;
His name is pure, his fame is free.

[Contributed to the *Shakespearian Show-Book*, 1884.]

He is a republican at heart, holding that the Queen's throne must rest

Broad-based upon her people's will,

[To the Queen.]

and he does not hesitate to express his confidence in

our slowly-grown
And *crown'd Republic's* crowning common-sense.

[Epilogue to *Idylls of the King*.]

But he has no faith in the unguided and ungoverned mob.
He calls Freedom

Thou loather of the lawless crown
As of the lawless crowd.

[Freedom, 1884.]

It has been said that his poetry shows no trace of sympathy with the struggles of the people to resist tyranny and defend their liberties with the sword. This is not true. In one of his earliest sonnets he speaks with enthusiasm of Poland's fight for freedom, and in one of his latest he hails the same spirit and the same effort in Montenegro. In "The Third of February, 1852," he expresses his indignation at the *coup d'état* by which Louis Napoleon destroyed the French Republic, and praises the revolutions which overthrew Charles I and James II. He dedicates a sonnet to Victor Hugo, the "stormy voice of France." With the utmost deliberation and distinctness he justifies the cause of the colonies in the American Revolution: once in "England and America in 1782," and again in the ode for the "Opening of the Indian and Colonial Exhibition," 1886.

It has been said that he has no sympathy with the modern idea of the patriotism of humanity,—that his love of his own country hides from him the vision of universal liberty and brotherhood. This is not true. He speaks of it in many places,—in "Locksley Hall," in "Victor Hugo," in "The Making of Man,"—and in the "Ode sung at the Opening of the International Exhibition," 1861, he urges free commerce and peaceful coöperation among the nations:—

Till each man find his own in all men's good,
And all men work in noble brotherhood,
Breaking their mailed fleets and armed towers,
And ruling by obeying Nature's powers,
And gathering all the fruits of earth and crown'd with all her flowers.

It may be, as the Rev. Stopford Brooke says in his book on Tennyson, that this view of things is less "poetic" than that which is presented by the poets of revolt, that it "lowers the note of beauty, of fire, of aspiration, of passion." But after all, it was Tennyson's real view and he could not well deny or conceal it. The important question is whether it is true and just. And that is the first question which a great poet asks. He does not lend himself to the proclamation of follies and falsehoods, however fiery, merely for the sake of being more "poetic."

In Tennyson's love poems, while there is often an intensity of passion, there is also a singular purity of feeling, a sense of reverence for the mystery of love, and a profound loyalty to the laws which it is bound to obey in a harmonious and well-ordered world. True, he takes the romantic, rather than the classical, attitude towards love. It comes secretly, suddenly, by inexplicable ways. It is irresistible, absorbing, the strongest as well as the most precious thing in the world. But he does not therefore hold that it is a thing apart from the rest of life, exempt, uncontrollable, lawless. On the contrary, it should be, in its perfection, at once the inspiration and the consummation of all that is best in life. In love, truth and honour and fidelity and courage and unselfishness should come to flower.

There is none of the tropical iridescence of decadent erotomania in Tennyson's love poetry. The fatal shame of that morbid and consuming fever of the flesh is touched in the description of the madness of Lucretius, in "Balin and

Balan," and in "Merlin and Vivien"; but it is done in a way that reveals the essential hatefulness of lubricity.

There is no lack of warmth and bright colour in the poems which speak of true love; but it is the glow of health instead of the hectic flush of disease; not the sickly hues that mask the surface of decay, but the livelier iris that the spring-time brings to the neck of the burnished dove.

He does not fail to see the tragedies of love. There is the desperate ballad of "Oriana," the sombre story of "Aylmer's Field," the picture of the forsaken Mariana in her moated grange, the pathetic idyll of Elaine who died for love of Lancelot. But the tragic element in these poems comes from the thwarting of love by circumstance, not from anything shameful or lawless in the passion itself.

In "The Gardener's Daughter" the story of a pure and simple love is told with a clean rapture that seems to make earth and sky glow with new beauty, and with a reticence that speaks not of shallow feeling, but of reverent emotion, refusing to fling open

the doors that bar
The secret bridal chambers of the heart.

In *The Princess*, at the end, triumphant love rises to the height of prophecy, foretelling the harmony of manhood and womanhood in the world's great bridals:—

‘Dear, but let us type them now
In our own lives, and this proud watchword rest
Of equal; seeing either sex alone
Is half itself, and in true marriage lies
Nor equal, nor unequal: each fulfils
Defect in each, and always thought in thought,
Purpose in purpose, will in will, they grow,
The single pure and perfect animal,
The two-cell'd heart beating, with one full stroke,
Life.’

There are two of Tennyson's poems in which the subject of love is treated in very different ways, but with an equally close and evident relation to the sense of harmony and law which pervades his poetry. In one of them, it seems to me, the treatment is wonderfully successful; the poet makes good his design. In the other, I think, he comes a little short of it and leaves us unsatisfied and questioning.

Maud is among the most purely impassioned presentations of a love-story since Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. It not only tells in music the growth of a deep, strong, absorbing love, victorious over obstacles, but it shows the redeeming, ennobling power of such a passion, which leads the selfish hero out of his bitterness and narrowness and makes him able at the last to say,

Comfort her, comfort her, all things good,
While I am over the sea !
Let me and my passionate love go by,
But speak to her all things holy and high,
Whatever happen to me !
Me and my harmful love go by ;
But come to her waking, find her asleep,
Powers of the height, Powers of the deep,
And comfort her tho' I die.

The tragedy of the poem is wrought not by love, but by another passion, lawless, discordant, uncontrolled,—the passion of proud hatred which brings about the quarrel with Maud's brother, the fatal duel, her death, the exile and madness of her lover. But the poem does not end in darkness, after all, for he awakes again to "the better mind," and the love whose earthly consummation his own folly has marred abides with him as the inspiration of a nobler life. The hero may be wrong in thinking that the Crimean War is to be a blessing to England and to the world. But he is surely right in saying,

It is better to fight for the good than to rail at the ill.

In the *Idylls of the King* there are two main threads of love running through the many-figured tapestry : Arthur's love for Guinevere, loyal, royal, but somewhat cold and ineffectual : Guinevere's love for Lancelot, disloyal and untrue, but warm and potent. It is the secret influence of this lawless passion, infecting the court, that breaks up the Round Table, and brings the kingdom to ruin and the King to his defeat. In "Guinevere" Tennyson departs from the story as it is told by Malory and introduces a scene entirely of his own invention : the last interview between Arthur, on his way to "that great battle in the west," and the fallen Queen, hiding in the convent at Almesbury. It is a very noble scene ; noble in its setting in the moon-swathed pallor of the dead winter night ; noble in its austere splendour of high diction and slow-moving verse, intense with solemn passion, bare to the heart ; noble in its conception of the King's godlike forgiveness and of Guinevere's remorse and agony of shame, too late to countervail the harm that she had done on earth, though not too late to win the heavenly pardon. All that Arthur says of the evil wrought by unlawful and reckless love is true :—

The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws.

All that he says of the crime that it would be to condone the Queen's sin, for the sake of prudence and peace, reseating her in her place of light,

The mockery of my people and their bane,

is also true, though it seems at the moment a little too much like preaching. But there is one thing lacking,—one thing that is necessary to make the scene altogether convincing : some trace of human sympathy in Arthur's "vast pity," some consciousness of fault or failure on his part in not giving Guinevere all that her nature needed to guard her from the

temptations of a more vivid though a lower passion. Splendid as his words of pardon are, and piercingly pathetic as is that last farewell of love, still loyal though defrauded ; yet he does not quite win us. He is more godlike than it becomes a man to be. He is too sure that he has never erred, too conscious that he is above weakness or reproach. We remember the lonely Lancelot in his desolate castle ; we think of his courtesy, his devotion, his splendid courage, his winning tenderness, his ardour, the unwavering passion by force of which

His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Was it wonder that Guinevere, seeing the King absorbed in affairs of state, remote, abstracted, inaccessible, yielded to this nearer and more intimate joy? Sin it was : shame it was : that Tennyson makes us see clearly. But how could it have been otherwise? Was not the breaking of the law the revenge that nature herself took for a need unsatisfied, a harmony uncompleted and overlooked? This is the question that remains unanswered at the close of the *Idylls of the King*. And therefore I think the poem unsatisfactory in its treatment of love.

But though Tennyson avoids this question, and lets Lancelot slip out of the poem at last without a word, disappearing like a shadow, he never falters in his allegiance to his main principle,—the supremacy of law and order. This indeed is the central theme of the epic : the right of soul to rule over sense and the ruin that comes when the relation is reversed. The poem ends tragically. But above the wreck of a great human design the poet sees the vision of a God who “fulfils Himself in many ways” ; and after earth’s confusions and defeats he sees the true-hearted King enthroned in the spiritual city and the repentant Queen passing

To where beyond these voices there is peace..

6. A religious spirit pervades and marks the poetry of Tennyson. His view of the world and of human life—his view even of the smallest flower that blooms in the world—is illumined through and through by his faith in the Divine presence and goodness and power. This faith was not always serene and untroubled. It was won after a hard conflict with doubt and despondency, the traces of which may be seen in such poems as "The Two Voices" and "The Vision of Sin." But the issue was never really in danger. He was not a doubter seeking to win a faith. He was a believer defending himself against misgivings, fighting to hold fast that which he felt to be essential to his life. The success of his struggle is recorded in *In Memoriam*, which rises through suffering and perplexity to a lofty and unshaken trust in

The truths that never can be proved,
Until we close with all we loved
And all we flow from, soul in soul.

It is not difficult to trace in his religious poems of this period the influence of the theology of the Rev. F. D. Maurice, who was one of his closest friends. The truths which Maurice presented most frequently, such as the immanence of God in nature, man's filial relation to Him, the reality of human brotherhood, the final victory of Love; the difficulties which he recognized in connection with these truths, such as the disorders and conflicts in nature, the apparent reckless waste of life, the sins and miseries of mankind; and the way in which he met and overcame these difficulties, not by abstract reasoning, nor by a reference to authority, but by an appeal to the moral and spiritual necessities and intuitions of the human heart,—all these are presented in Tennyson's poetry.

In later life there seems to have been a recurrence of questionings, shown in such poems as "Despair," "De

Profundis," "The Ancient Sage," "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," "Vastness," "By an Evolutionist." But this was not so much a conflict arising from within, as a protest against the tendencies of what he called "a terrible age of unfaith," an effort to maintain the rights of the spirit against scientific materialism. Later still the serene, triumphant mood of the proem to *In Memoriam* was repeated in "Crossing the Bar," "The Silent Voices," "Faith," "The Death of the Duke of Clarence," and he reposed upon

that Love which is and was
My Father and my Brother and my God.

In spite of his declared unwillingness to formulate his creed, arising partly from his conviction that humility was the right intellectual attitude in the presence of the great mysteries, and partly from the feeling that men would not understand him if he tried to put his belief into definite forms, it is by no means impossible to discover in his poetry certain clear and vivid visions of religious truths from which his poetic life drew strength and beauty. Three of these truths stand out distinct and dominant.

The first is the real, personal, conscious life of God. "Take that away," said he, "and you take away the backbone of the Universe." Tennyson is not a theological poet like Milton or Cowper, nor even like Wordsworth or Browning. But hardly anything that he has written could have been written as it is, but for his underlying faith that God lives, and knows, and loves. This faith is clearly expressed in "The Higher Pantheism." It is not really pantheism at all, for while the natural world is regarded as "the Vision of Him who reigns," it is also the sign and symbol that the human soul is distinct from Him. All things reveal Him, but man's sight and hearing are darkened so that he cannot understand the revelation.

God is in all things : He is with all souls, but He is not to be identified with the human spirit, which has "power to feel 'I am I.' " Fellowship with Him is to be sought and found in prayer.

Speak to Him thou for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet —
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

This confidence in the reality of prayer is expressed in many of Tennyson's deeper poems. We find it in "Enoch Arden," in "St. Agnes' Eve," in "The Palace of Art," in *In Memoriam*, in "The Two Voices," in the "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," in "Doubt and Prayer," in "Elaine," in "Guinevere," in "Morte d'Arthur": —

Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of.

Tennyson's optimism was dependent upon his faith in a God to whom men can pray. It was not a matter of temperament, like Browning's optimism. Tennyson inherited from his father a strain of gloomy blood, a tendency to despondency. He escaped from it only by learning to trust in the Divine wisdom and love : —

That God which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.

The second truth which stands out in the poetry of Tennyson is the freedom of the human will. This is a mystery : —

Our wills are ours, we know not how.

It is also an indubitable reality : —

This main-miracle, that thou art thou,
With power on thine own act and on the world.

[De Profundis.]

The existence of such liberty of action in created beings implies a self-limitation on the part of God, but it is essential to moral responsibility and vital communion with the Divine. If man is only a "magnetic mockery," a "cunning cast in clay," he has no real life of his own, nothing to give back to God. The joy of effort and the glory of virtue depend upon freedom. This is the meaning of Enid's Song, in "The Marriage of Geraint":—

For man is man and master of his fate.

This is the central thought of that strong little poem called "Will":—

O well for him whose will is strong!
He suffers, but he will not suffer long;
He suffers, but he cannot suffer wrong.

This is the theme of the last lyric of *In Memoriam*:—

O living will that shalt endure
When all that seems shall suffer shock,
Rise in the spiritual rock,
Flow thro' our deeds and make them pure.

The third truth which is vitally embodied in Tennyson's poems is the assurance of Life after Death. This he believed in most deeply and uttered most passionately. He felt that the present life would be poor and pitiful, almost worthless and unendurable, without the hope of Immortality. The rolling lines of "Vastness" are a long protest against the cold doctrine that death ends all. "Wages" is a swift utterance of the hope which inspires Virtue:—

Give her the wages of going on, and not to die.

The second "Locksley Hall," the Wellington Ode, "The May Queen," "Guinevere," "Enoch Arden," "The Deserter"

House," "The Poet's Song," "Happy," the lines on "The Death of the Duke of Clarence," "The Silent Voices," — it is not possible to enumerate the poems in which the clear faith in a future life finds expression. *In Memoriam* is altogether filled and glorified with the passion of Immortality: not a vague and impersonal survival in other forms, but a continuance of individual life beyond the grave:—

Eternal form shall still divide
The eternal soul from all beside;
And I shall know him when we meet.

It is a vain and idle thing for men who are themselves indifferent to the spiritual aspects of life, or perhaps hostile and contemptuous towards a religious view of the universe, to declare that there is no place in poetry for such subjects, and to sneer at every poem in which they appear as "a disguised sermon." No doubt there are many alleged poems dealing with religion which deserve no better name: versified expositions of theological dogma: creeds in metre: moral admonitions tagged with rhyme; a weariness to the flesh. But so there are alleged poems which deal with the facts of the visible world and of human history in the same dull didactic manner: botanical treatises in verse: rhymed chronicles: doctrinaire dramas. The fault, in both cases, lies not in the subjects, but in the spirit in which they are approached.

It is not the presence of religion that spoils religious verse. It is the absence of poetry. Poetry is vision. Poetry is music. Poetry is an overflow of wonder and joy, pity and love. Truths which lie in the spiritual realm have as much power to stir the heart to this overflow as truths which lie in the physical realm. There is an imaginative vision of the meaning of religious truths — a swift flashing of their significance upon the inward eye, a sudden thrilling of their music through the inward ear — which

is as full of beauty and wonder, as potent to "surprise us by a fine excess," as any possible human experience. It is poetic in the very highest sense of the word. There may be poetry, and very admirable poetry, without it. But the poet who never sees it, nor sings of it, in whose verse there is no ray of light, no note of music, from beyond the range of the five senses, has never reached the heights nor sounded the depths of human nature.

The influence of Tennyson's poetry in revealing the reality and beauty of three great religious beliefs — the existence of the Divine Spirit who is our Father, the freedom of the human will, and the personal life after death — was deep, far-reaching, and potent. He stood among the doubts and conflicts of the last century as a witness for the things that are invisible and eternal: the things that men may forget if they will, but if they forget them their hearts wither, and the springs of inspiration run dry. His rich and musical verse brought a message of new cheer and courage to the young men of that questioning age who were fain to defend their spiritual heritage against the invasions of a hard and fierce materialism. In the vital conflict for the enlargement of faith to embrace the real discoveries of science, he stood forth as a leader. In the great silent reaction from the solitude of a consistent skepticism, his voice was a clear-toned bell calling the unwilling exiles of belief to turn again and follow the guidance of the Spirit. No new arguments were his. But the sweetness of a poet's persuasion, the splendour of high truths embodied in a poet's imagination, the convincing beauty of noble beliefs set forth in clear dream and solemn vision, — these were the powers that he employed.

And if the age of doubt in which he lived has passed, not into an age of denial, but, as it seems, into the dawn of a new age of belief, they who look and long for the light of spiritual

life to rise yet higher and spread yet more gloriously, will honour Tennyson not only as a poet, but also as a prophet,—a defender of the inward treasures that make life worth living, an interpreter of the true meaning of the world, a seer who foresaw the victory of faith and helped mightily to win it.

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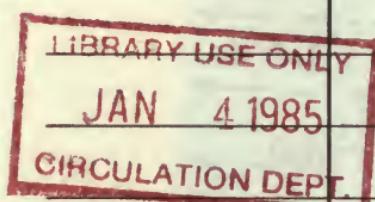
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